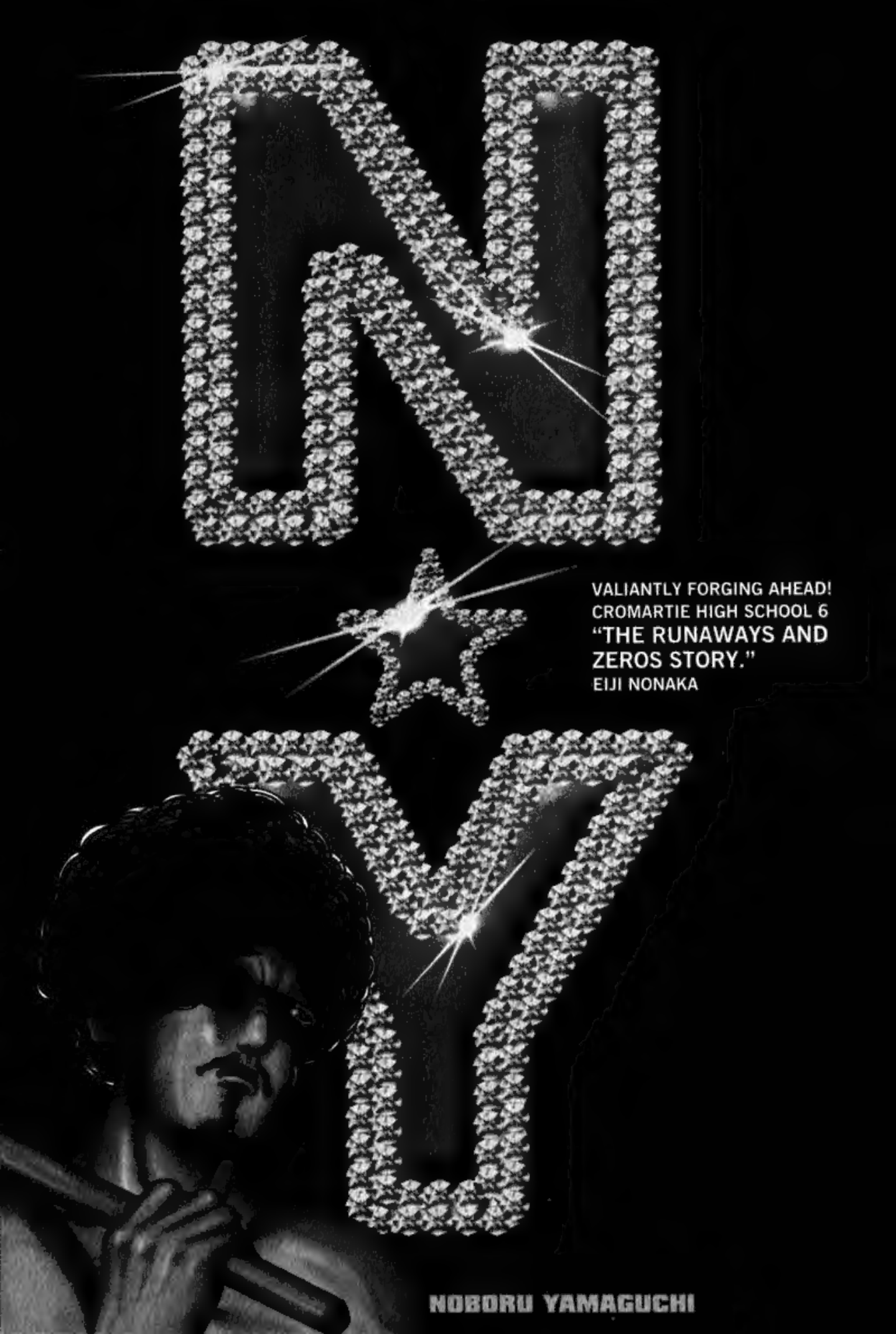
VALIANTLY FORGING AHEAD!
CROMARTIE HIGH SCHOOL 6
"THE RUNAWAYS AND ZEROS STORY."
EIJI NONAKA
NOBORU YAMAGUCHI

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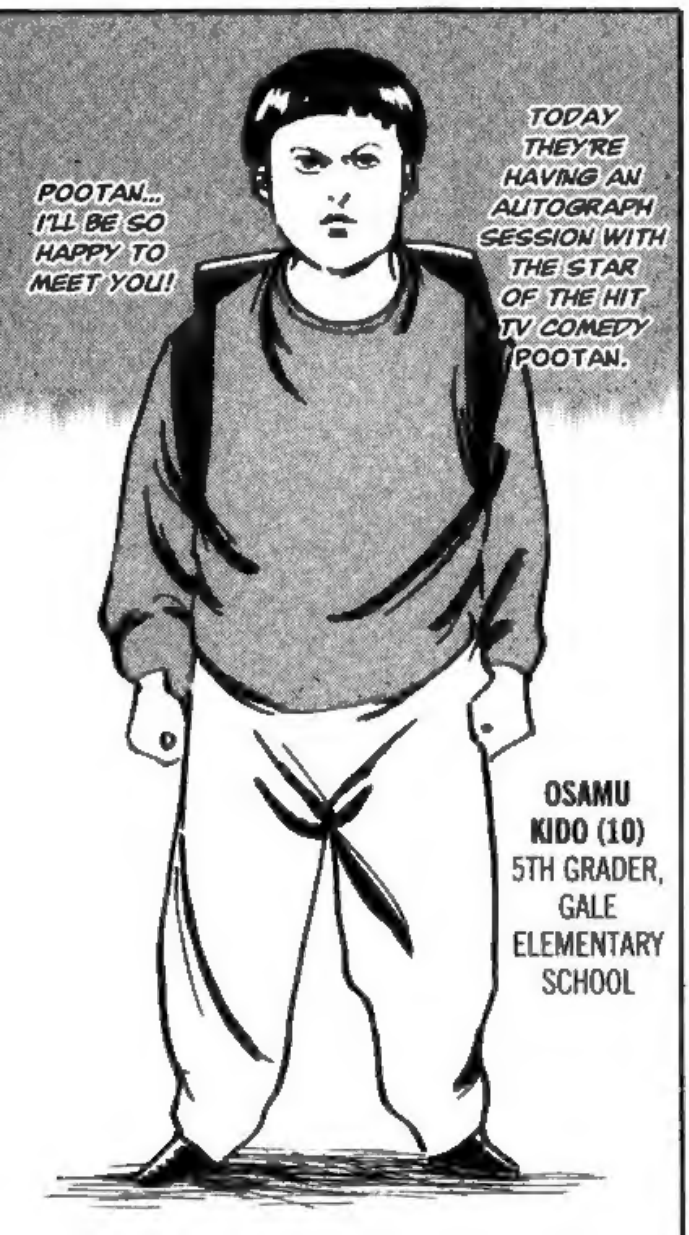
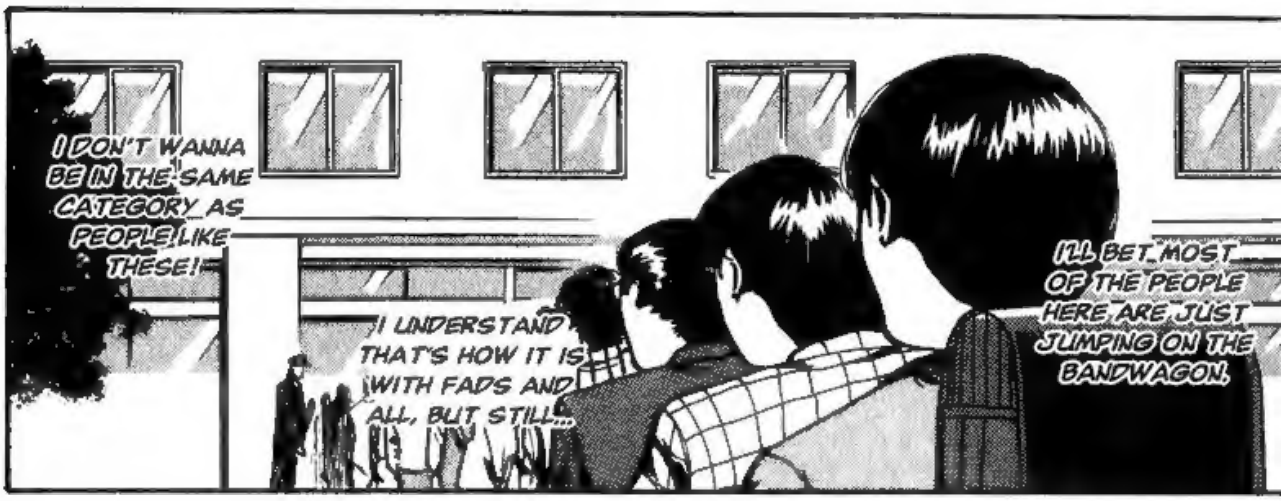
CHAPTER 121: **STARMAN**


POOTAN... I'LL BE SO HAPPY TO MEET YOU!
TODAY THEY'RE HAVING AN AUTOGRAPH SESSION WITH THE STAR OF THE HIT TV COMEDY POOTAN.
OSAMU KIDO (10)
5TH GRADER, GALE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

THE SHOW IS A LITTLE OUT THERE, SO SOME PEOPLE WERE WORRIED WHETHER WE KIDS WOULD GET INTO IT OR NOT, BUT IT LOOKS LIKE IT'S CAUGHT ON. IT'S A GREAT FEELING FOR THOSE OF US WHO ALWAYS BELIEVED THAT POOTAN WOULD MAKE IT BIG.
I'VE BEEN INTO POOTAN FOR THREE YEARS, SINCE BEFORE IT WAS EVEN POPULAR.


I DON'T WANNA BE IN THE SAME CATEGORY AS PEOPLE LIKE THESE!
I UNDERSTAND THAT'S HOW IT IS WITH FADS AND ALL, BUT STILL...
I'LL BET MOST OF THE PEOPLE HERE ARE JUST JUMPING ON THE BANDWAGON.

THAT'S ONE OF THE MORE SUBTLE ASPECTS OF FAN MENTALITY.
I MEAN, THERE'S NO WAY THESE PEOPLE COULD KNOW THE TRUE HUMOR OF POOTAN.
AS A FAN SINCE BEFORE ANYONE EVEN KNEW ABOUT POOTAN, I'M GLAD TO SEE THE SHOW'S GOTTEN SO POPULAR, BUT I KIND OF MISS THE OLD DAYS, TOO.
POOTAN
AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY

I'LL BET HE DOESN'T KNOW THE FIRST THING ABOUT POOTAN! HE'S PROBABLY HERE 'CUZ HIS GIRLFRIEND OR SOMEONE ASKED HIM TO COME GET AN AUTOGRAPH. THAT JUST PISSES ME OFF!
AND WHAT'S WITH THAT ROUGHNECK WITH THE AFRO?

I REALLY AM HAPPY FOR YOU, POOTAN!
STILL, I GUESS I SHOULD BE GLAD THAT THE SHOW'S SUCH A HIT...

I'VE BEEN YOUR SILENT SUPPORTER RIGHT FROM THE START... AND THAT'S THE WAY IT SHOULD BE.

THERE'S NO TRACE OF THAT INEXPERIENCE FROM BACK WHEN THE SHOW STARTED. COME TO THINK OF IT, DID YOU EVER LET IT SHOW EVEN WHEN YOU DIDN'T HAVE SUCH A FIRM GRASP ON THE CHARACTER? IN ANY CASE, I'VE BEEN A FAN SINCE THE VERY BEGINNING.
YOU'VE DEVELOPED A FINE, STRONG LOOK, POOTAN.

THIS WILL BE THE FIRST TIME I'VE SEEN HIM IN THE FLESH. IT'S GREAT TO MEET YOU, POOTAN!

IT'S ALMOST MY TURN. I'M GETTING KIND'A NERVOUS...
OK EVERYONE, LET'S STAY SINGLE FILE.

HUH?

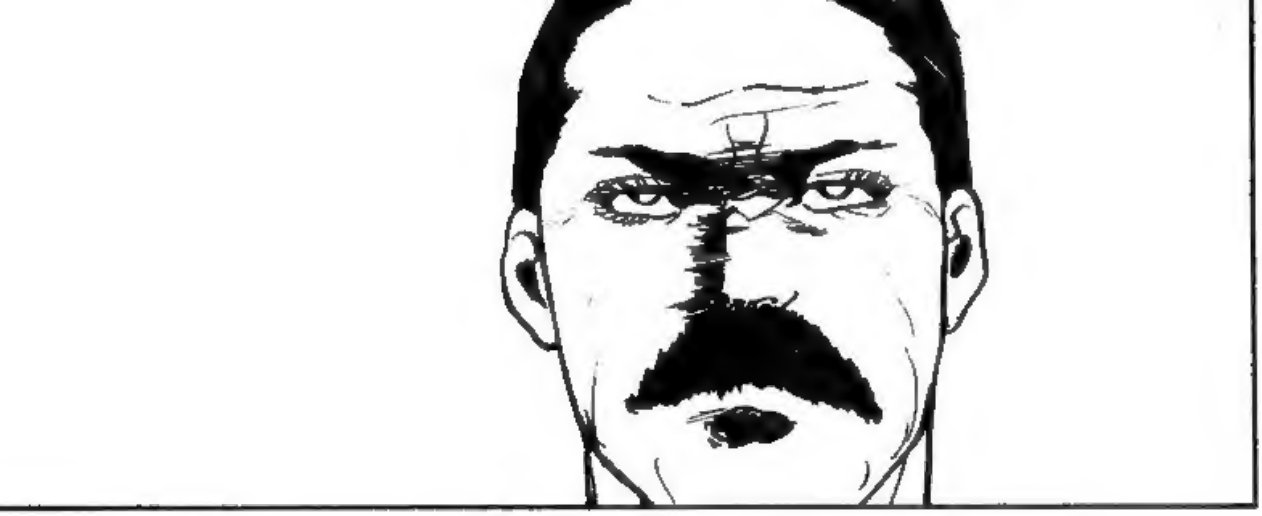
I GUESS IT'S TRUE THAT PEOPLE LOOK DIFFERENT IN REAL LIFE THAN THEY DO ON TV. NOT LIKE I HAVE ANY EXPERIENCE WITH THIS KIND OF THING, BUT...

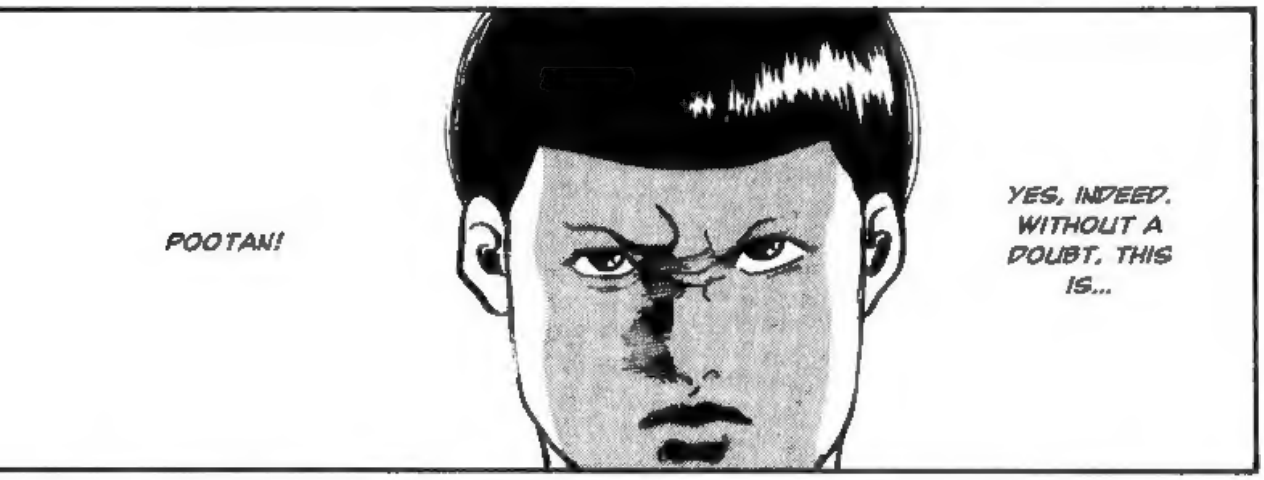
HMM...I GET THE FEELING THERE'S SOMETHING DIFFERENT ABOUT HIM.

OK! I'M GONNA PULL MYSELF TOGETHER AND TRY HAVING ANOTHER LOOK!

FOR ONE THING, THE REAL POOTAN DOESN'T HAVE A MUSTACHE! IT'S NOT EVEN LIKE HE'S DISSIMILAR FROM THE REAL POOTAN--HE'S ABOUT AS DIFFERENT AS YOU CAN GET!
IT'S NO GOOD! THIS GUY IS COMPLETELY DIFFERENT!
SO WHY HASN'T ANYBODY SAID ANYTHING?
AFTER ALL, IT'S NOT LIKE THEY'RE DEVOTED FANS. THEY'D PROBABLY THINK ANYONE WEARING THAT SUIT WAS POOTAN. HMPH. KIDS!
OH, I GET IT! THEY'RE ALL BEING FOOLED BY HIS OUTFIT!
I MAY NOT LOOK IT, BUT I'M AN ADULT! FINE, I'LL JUST PLAY ALONG AND PRETEND THIS GUY IS POOTAN.
THE WHOLE THING LEAVES A BAD TASTE IN MY MOUTH, BUT IT WOULD BE IMMATURE OF ME TO START THROWING A FIT ABOUT IT NOW.
WELL, I GUESS IT CAN'T BE HELPED. POOTAN'S PROBABLY A BUSY GUY. HE WOULDN'T BE THE FIRST PERSON TO USE A STAND-IN.

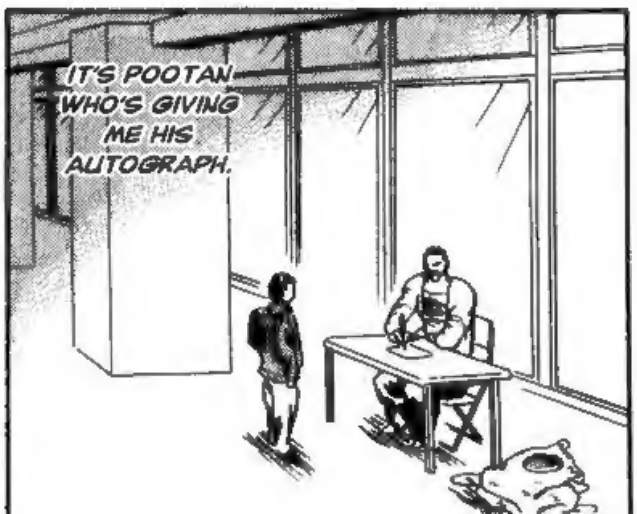
NOW HE'S NOT EVEN WEARING THE OUTFIT!
.....
I DON'T CARE HOW GULLIBLE YOU ARE, THERE'S A LIMIT TO EVERYTHING, YOU IDIOTS!
DAMMIT! HOW CAN THEY ALL SIT STILL FOR THIS?!
IF I TRY REALLY HARD, I CAN MAKE MYSELF BELIEVE IT. HE IS POOTAN!
FINE, I GIVE UP! THIS GUY'S SUPPOSED TO BE POOTAN, RIGHT?

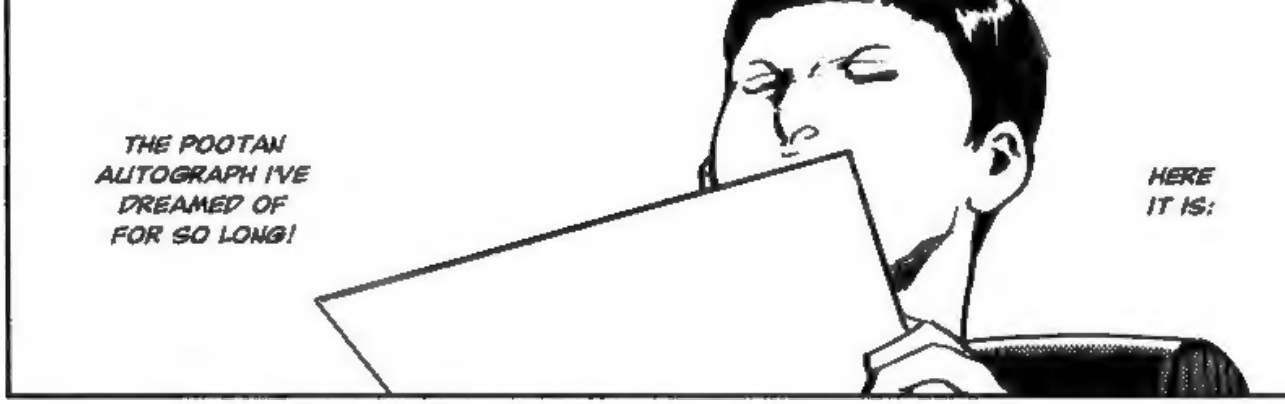



POOTAN!
YES, INDEED. WITHOUT A DOUBT, THIS IS...

HE'S POOTAN!
THERE'S NO TWO WAYS ABOUT IT...

IT'S POOTAN WHO'S SHAKING MY HAND.


IT'S POOTAN WHO'S GIVING ME HIS AUTOGRAPH.



THIS IS FREDDIE'S NEW PART TIME JOB.

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CROMARTIE HIGH SCHOOL

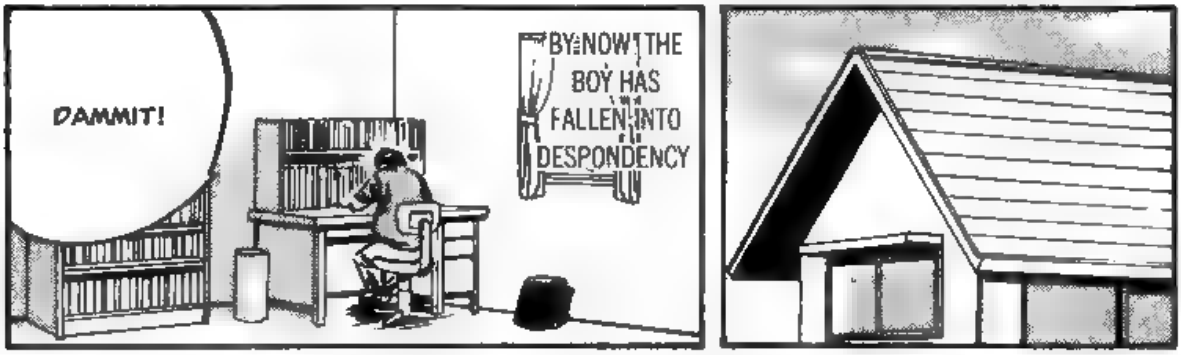
VOL. 6

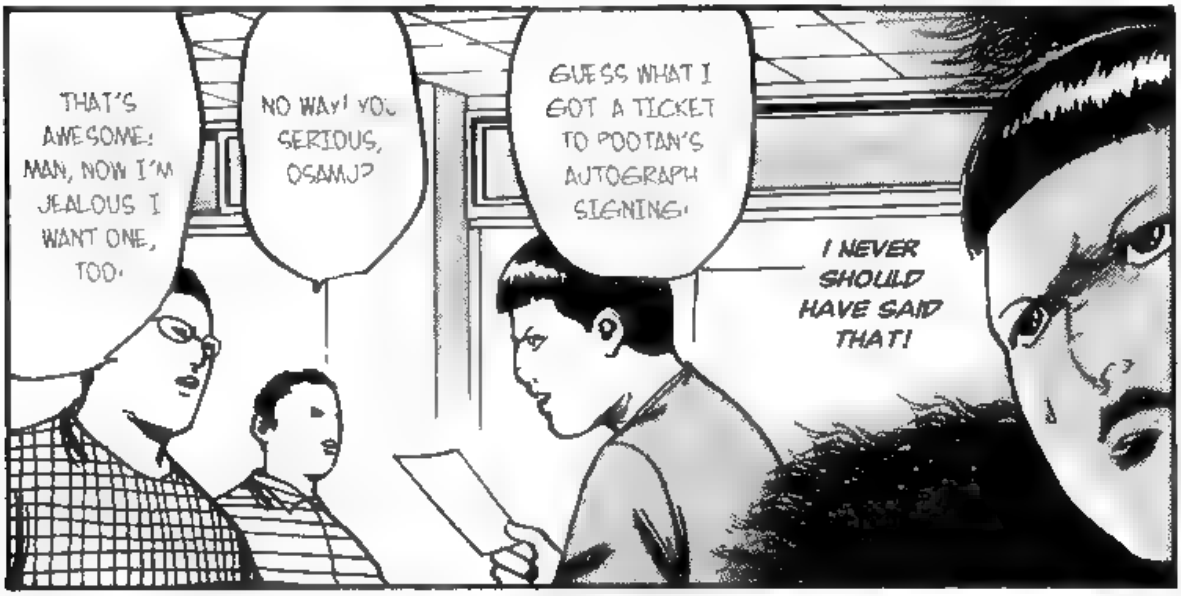
AJISHIO is his name!
AJISHIO is his game!

Don't think. Feel!

Eiji Nonaka

CHAPTER 122: **NOW I'M HERE**




THAT'S AWESOME! MAN, NOW I'M JEALOUS I WANT ONE, TOO.
NO WAY! YOU SERIOUS, OSAMU?
GUESS WHAT I GOT A TICKET TO POOTAN'S AUTOGRAPH SIGNING.
I NEVER SHOULD HAVE SAID THAT!

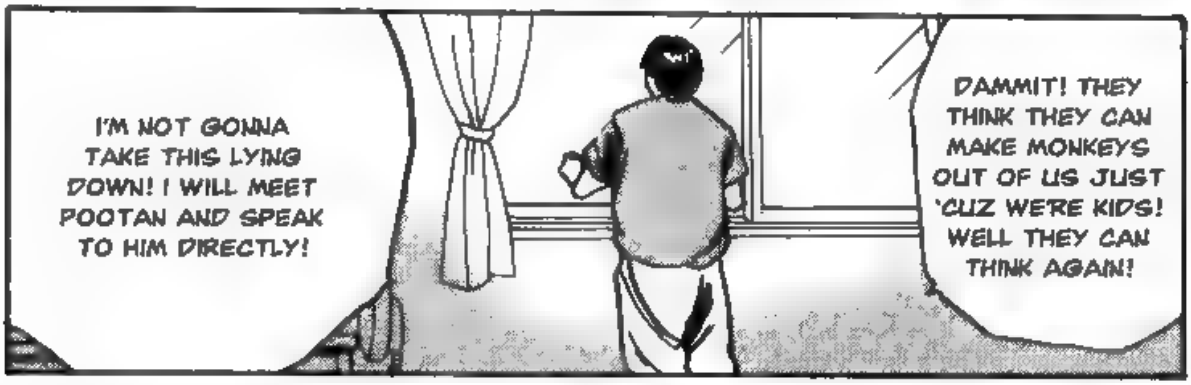
BUT WHAT THE HELL AM I GONNA DO WITH THIS?!

THERE'S NO WAY THIS GUY COULD BE POOTAN! IF I TAKE THIS TO SCHOOL, EVERYONE WILL MAKE FUN OF ME!
Who the heck IS he anyway?
WHAT WAS I THINKING? LOOKING AT IT AGAIN, IT'S OBVIOUS THAT THIS IS JUST SOME OLD DUDE!

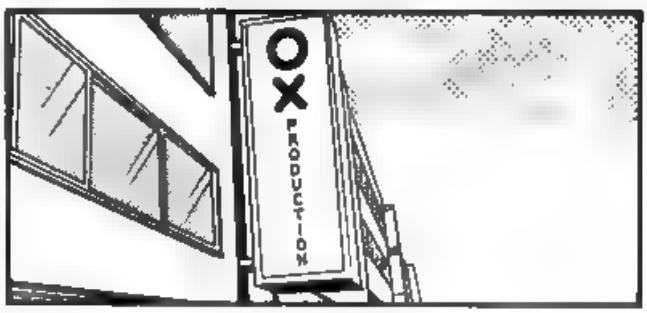
WAIT A MINUTE.

PLUS, I EVEN HAD TO BUY THIS $20 BOOK! THEY SAID I COULDN'T HAVE AN AUTOGRAPH WITHOUT ONE.
POOT
AUTOBIOGR

DON'T TELL ME THAT OLD GUY WROTE THIS "AUTOBIOGRAPHY," TOO!


I'M NOT GONNA TAKE THIS LYING DOWN! I WILL MEET POOTAN AND SPEAK TO HIM DIRECTLY!
DAMMIT! THEY THINK THEY CAN MAKE MONKEYS OUT OF US JUST 'CUZ WE'RE KIDS! WELL THEY CAN THINK AGAIN!

CHK
CHK

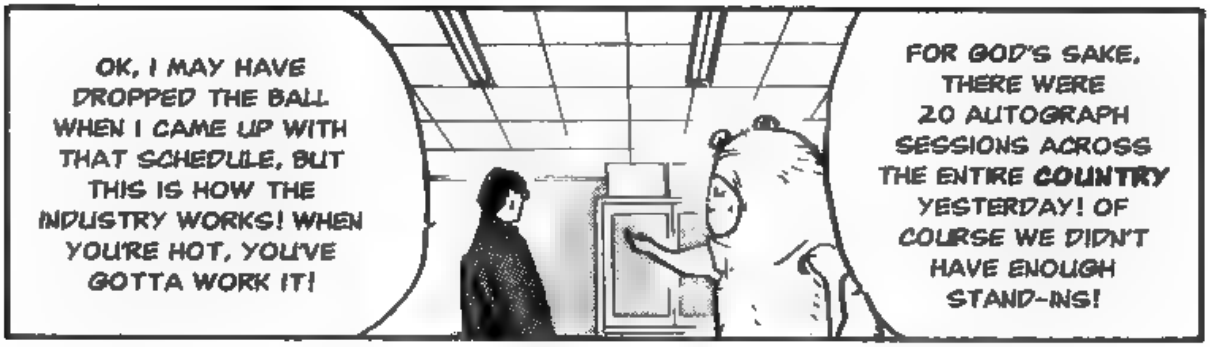

OX
PRODUCTION

THE PHONES ARE RINGING OFF THE HOOK WITH COMPLAINTS ABOUT YESTERDAY'S AUTOGRAPH SESSION!

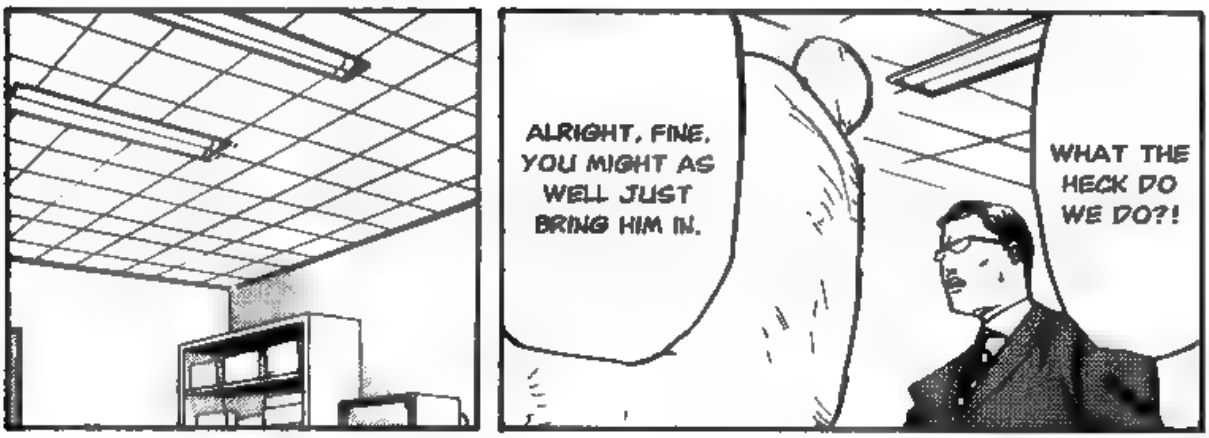
KA-CHK
THIS IS A DIS-ASTER!

AH. SO YOURS ARE, TOO?
HUH?
RING
RING
RING
RING
RING

WE DIDN'T HAVE MUCH OF A CHOICE, DID WE? HE WAS THE ONLY ONE LOOKING FOR WORK.
ANYWAY, I TOLD YOU THIS WASN'T THE TYPE OF GUY TO STAND IN FOR YOU!


OK, I MAY HAVE DROPPED THE BALL WHEN I CAME UP WITH THAT SCHEDULE, BUT THIS IS HOW THE INDUSTRY WORKS! WHEN YOU'RE HOT, YOU'VE GOTTA WORK IT!
FOR GOD'S SAKE, THERE WERE 20 AUTOGRAPH SESSIONS ACROSS THE ENTIRE COUNTRY YESTERDAY! OF COURSE WE DIDN'T HAVE ENOUGH STAND-INS!

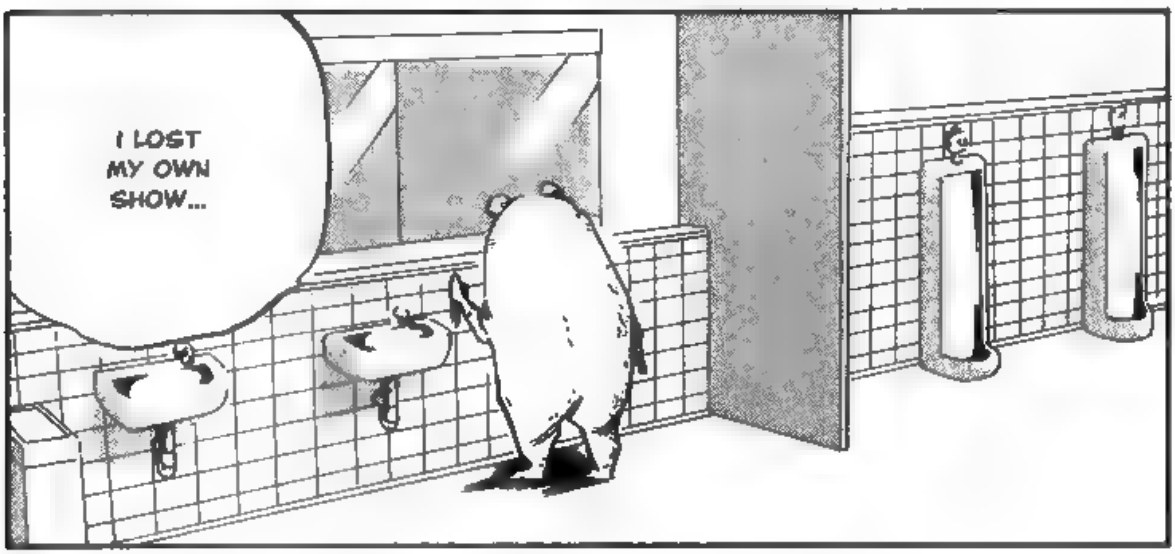
HE'S COMPLAINING THAT HE WAS "FOOLED BY SOME OLD DUDE WITH A MUSTACHE" AT YESTERDAY'S AUTOGRAPH SESSION.
OH, I ALMOST FORGOT. THERE'S SOME KID OUT FRONT MAKIN' A RACKET ABOUT WANTING TO SEE POOTAN.


ALRIGHT, FINE. YOU MIGHT AS WELL JUST BRING HIM IN.
WHAT THE HECK DO WE DO?!

I WENT TO THAT "POOTAN AUTOGRAPH SESSION" YESTERDAY, BUT IT WAS JUST SOME OLD GUY WITH A MUSTACHE! WHAT'S THE BIG IDEA?!
PARDON ME!
KA-CHK

HUH?!
WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
IT SEEMS THIS "MUSTACHE" BUSINESS HAS BEEN GETTING ME A LOT OF COMPLAINTS, BUT AS YOU CAN CLEARLY SEE, IT WAS ME AT THAT AUTOGRAPH SESSION YESTERDAY. LOOK, I STILL HAVE THE MUSTACHE.
UH, NO.
ANYWAY, DO YOU HAVE AN APPOINT-MENT?
A JOKE?
IT'S A JOKE.
B-BUT, YOU'VE NEVER HAD ONE ON TV, SO WHY...

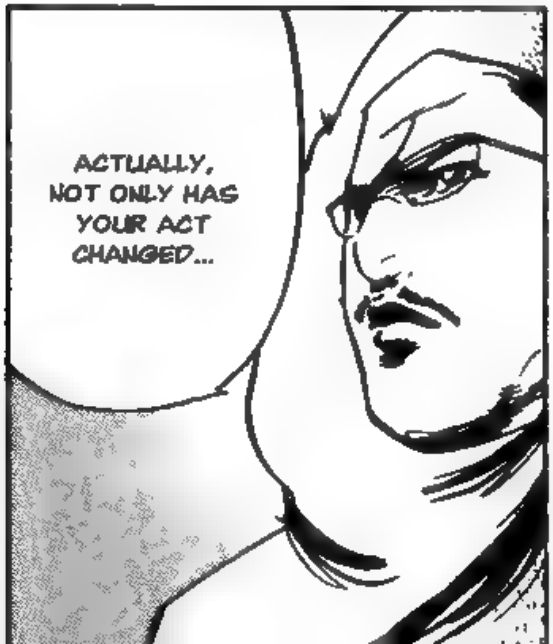
WHATEVER. YOU'VE GOT YOUR ANSWER, NOW SCRAM.
IT'S NOT A VERY FUNNY ONE, IS IT?
STILL, SEEING POOTAN DECEIVE A CHILD IS SOME-WHAT...
HEY, STAND-INS ARE A FACT OF LIFE IN THIS INDUSTRY. HECK, NO ONE EVEN WRITES THEIR OWN AUTOBIOGRAPHIES ANYMORE! I THINK I WAS ACTUALLY PRETTY KIND TO THE LITTLE GUY.
THAT WAS A LITTLE HARSH, DON'T YOU THINK? HE'S JUST AN INNOCENT CHILD.
THEY DON'T CARE ABOUT THE JOKES: THEY JUST WATCH BECAUSE OF THE SHOW'S LIGHT-HEARTED TONE! IT COULD BE AN OLD GUY WITH A MUSTACHE OR SOME LOSER OFF THE STREET--IF HE'S WEARING THE OUTFIT, IN THEIR MINDS HE'S POOTAN.
LISTEN, THOSE PEOPLE WHO SIT AT HOME WATCHING THE SHOW ON TV AND LAUGHING ARE A BUNCH OF MORONS!
WELL, I GUESS THAT'S THAT.
PFFF
.....
ANY-ONE WILL DO.
BWF

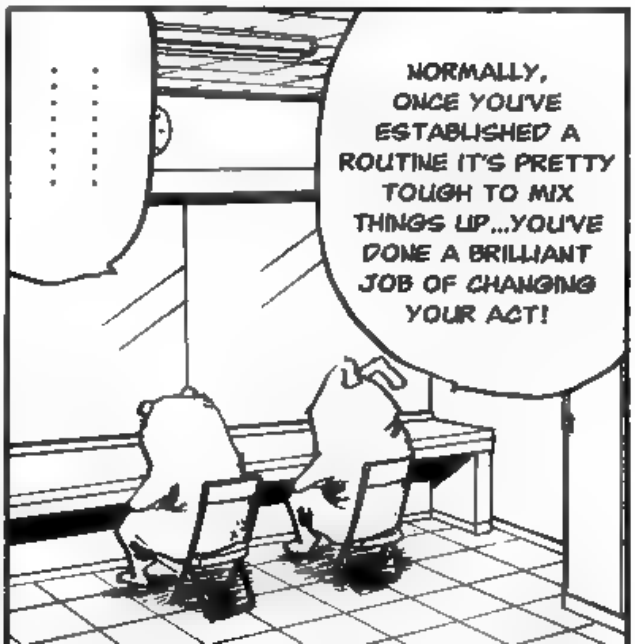


HE LOOKS GOOD FROM BEHIND.

CHAPTER 123: **NO ONE BUT YOU**

SURE, IT'S GREAT TO BE ABLE TO TAKE A SINGLE COMEDIC STYLE AND RUN WITH IT FOR YEARS, BUT AUDIENCES CAN GET BORED. EVERY NOW AND THEN YOU'LL SEE A COMEDIAN TRY TO TAKE HIS ACT TO A MORE CEREBRAL LEVEL, BUT IT'S AMAZING JUST HOW DIFFERENT YOUR APPROACH IS!




NORMALLY, ONCE YOU'VE ESTABLISHED A ROUTINE IT'S PRETTY TOUGH TO MIX THINGS UP...YOU'VE DONE A BRILLIANT JOB OF CHANGING YOUR ACT!

PRETTY MUCH EVERYTHING ABOUT YOU HAS CHANGED.
. . . . . .
. . . . . .
IT REALLY IS INCREDIBLE. IT'S LIKE YOU'VE BECOME A COMPLETELY DIFFERENT PERSON!
YOU ARE A DIFFERENT PERSON, AREN'T YOU?!
. . . . . .
OR RATHER, IT'S LIKE YOU'VE TRANSCENDED... UH...

SAY SOMETHING, DAMMIT!
. . . . . .
MEANWHILE
Pootan in normal clothes
WHAT A MESS. THAT MUSTACHIOED PART-TIMER STOLE MY GIG!
WHAT SHOULD I DO? HE'S PROBABLY HAVING A TOUGH TIME. I NEED TO GET OVER THERE AS QUICK AS I CAN!
AT LEAST MY PARTNER SHOULD'VE NOTICED SOMETHING IS WRONG.
THIS IS BAD. PEOPLE ARE ALREADY STARTING TO THINK THAT BASTARD IS THE REAL POOTAN!
Pootan without his makeup
THAT BASTARD WITH THE MUSTACHE IS A FAKE! I'M THE REAL POOTAN!
ALRIGHT, LISTEN UP!
K-CHK
OX PRODUCTION

TH-
THEY'RE DOING A ROUTINE TOGETHER!
THIS IS WHERE I GIVE THE PUNCH LINE, SO YOU GO LIKE THIS.
.....

HEY! CUT THAT OUT!
ONE LOOK SHOULD BE ENOUGH TO TELL YOU THAT THIS GUY'S A FAKE!

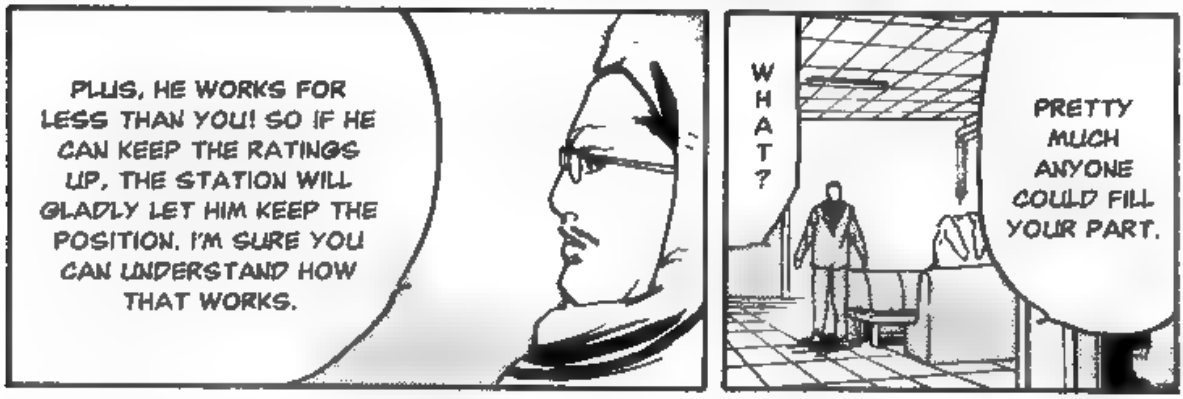
THAT'S ALL FOR TODAY. WE'LL START AT 2:00 TOMORROW, SO JUST COME BY HERE, OK?
.....

SO WHAT IF HE IS?
HUH?!

バタン P-CHT
CHK チャ
コク NOD
I GUESS I CAN SAY THIS NOW... I NEVER LIKED YOU THAT MUCH.
.....
WHAT THE HECK IS GOING ON? YOU'RE TAKING THIS PRANK A LITTLE TOO FAR.
YEAH, BUT... I MEAN, THOSE WERE OUR ROLES!
TO THE UNTRAINED EYE, IT WAS ALWAYS YOU IN THE LIMELIGHT, YOU GETTING ALL THE LAUGHS. IF WE SPLIT UP, I COULDN'T SEE MYSELF LANDING ANY OTHER JOBS.
WHAT?
THE PUBLIC? I'VE GOT NEWS FOR YOU. THE PUBLIC ALREADY THINKS HE IS POOTAN! NOW THAT HE'S ON THE SHOW, WE AREN'T GETTING ANY MORE COMPLAINTS...HELL, WE'RE MORE POPULAR THAN EVER!
THE PUBLIC WON'T LET YOU GET AWAY WITH THIS!
WHATEVER. I'M STICKING WITH THIS NEW GUY.

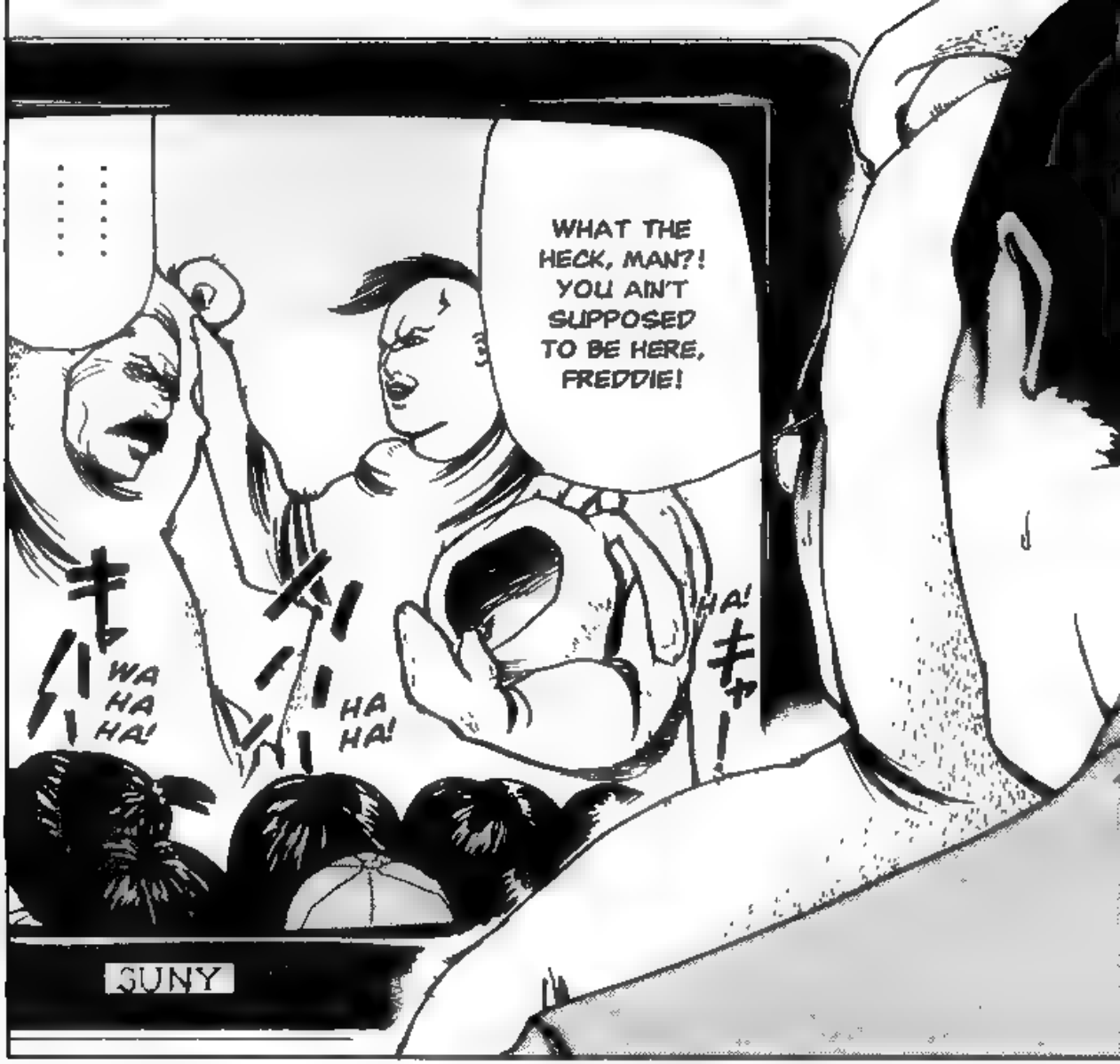
BUT IT LOOKS LIKE YOU DON'T HAVE ANYWHERE NEAR THE **PRECEDICE** YOU THOUGHT YOU DID!
.....
YOU USED TO CALL YOURSELF "THE KING OF TELEVISION" OR SOMETHING, DIDN'T YOU?

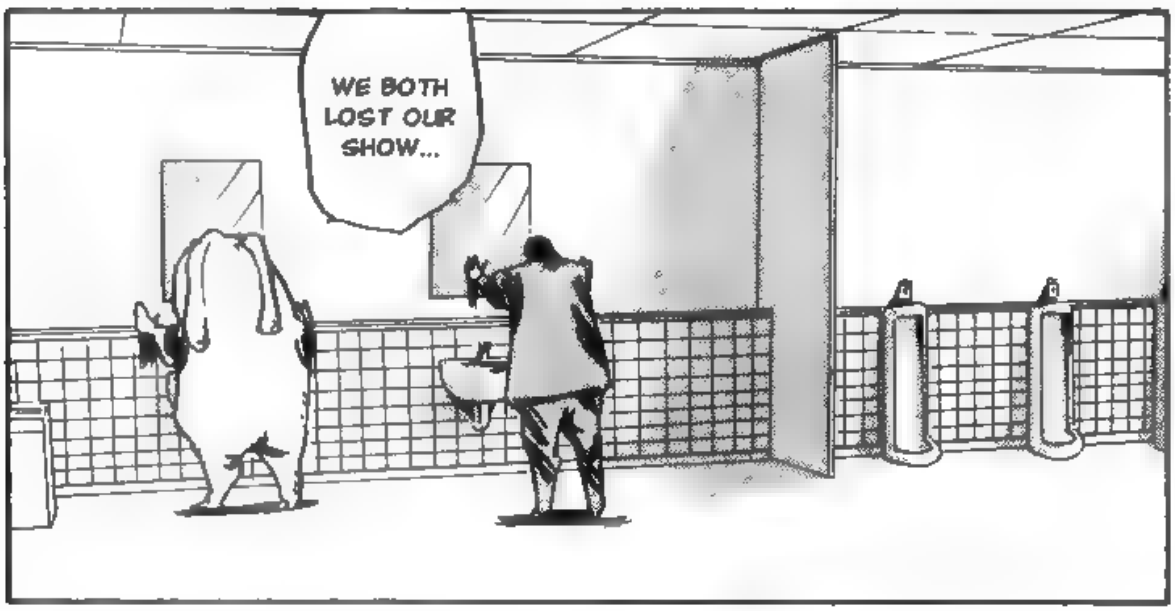
SHOCK


PLUS, HE WORKS FOR LESS THAN YOU! SO IF HE CAN KEEP THE RATINGS UP, THE STATION WILL GLADLY LET HIM KEEP THE POSITION. I'M SURE YOU CAN UNDERSTAND HOW THAT WORKS.
WHAT?
PRETTY MUCH ANYONE COULD FILL YOUR PART.

ANYWAY, HIS SILENT ROUTINE MAY BE NEW AND ECCENTRIC AND THE VIEWERS MAY LIKE IT WELL ENOUGH FOR NOW, BUT IT WON'T LAST LONG!
B-BUT ARE YOU SURE YOU CAN KEEP GOING ON WITH HIM? HE'S OBVIOUSLY THE SILENT TYPE... OR RATHER, THE TYPE THAT SAYS NOTHING WHATSOEVER. THAT'S WHY I HIRED HIM AS MY DOUBLE: I FIGURED HE COULDN'T BLURT OUT ANYTHING CONFIDENTIAL!

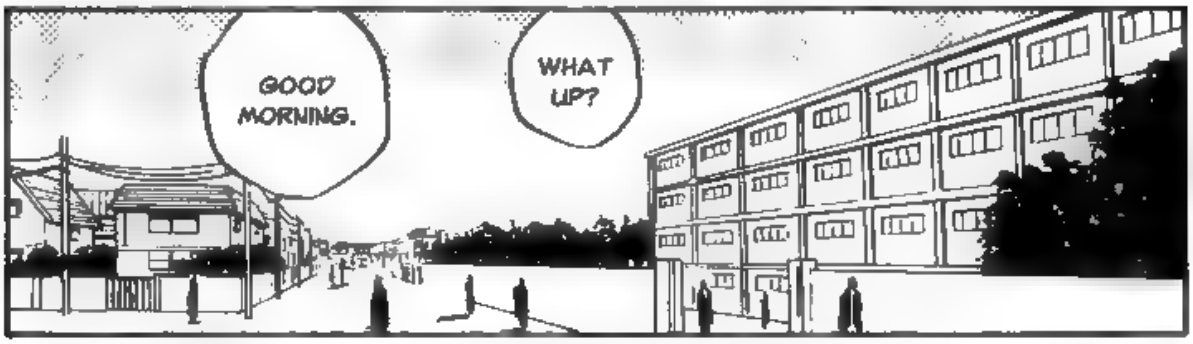
IF YOU'RE THAT CONFIDENT, WHY DON'T YOU JUST GO SOLO?
YOU'RE PRETTY CON-FIDENT, AREN'T YOU?
AS A SHOW, POOTAN JUST ISN'T COMPLETE WITHOUT ME!
HEY, I'M NOT THE ONE YOU SHOULD BE ANGRY AT. NOW GET LOST, I'M SICK OF LOOKIN' AT YA.
DON'T PUSH IT, YOU BAS-TARD!
OR COULD IT BE THAT WITHOUT THE POOTAN NAME AND OUTFIT, YOU'RE NOTHING?
HUH?!
DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA WHAT TIME IT IS? THE SHOW'S ALREADY STARTED!
HUH?
WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU DOING?!
K-CHK
BUT... WE'RE BOTH HERE.
THE SHOW?



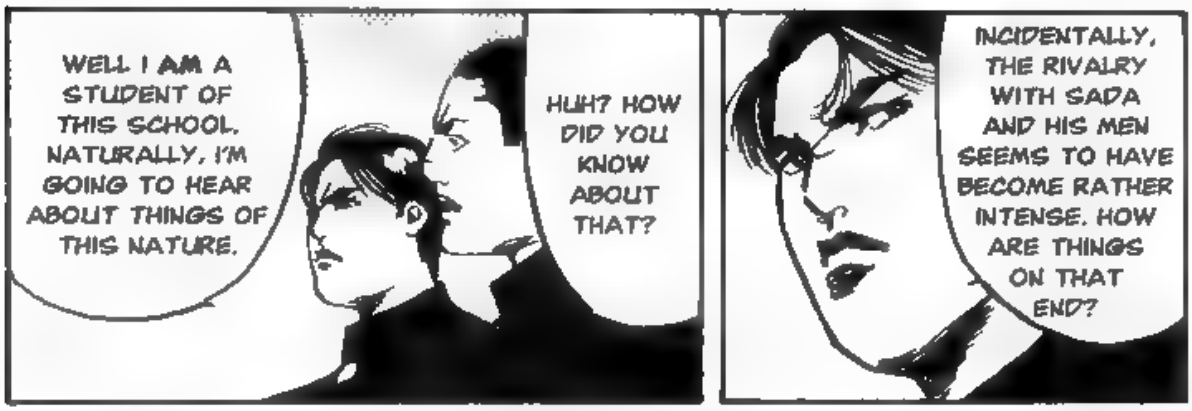


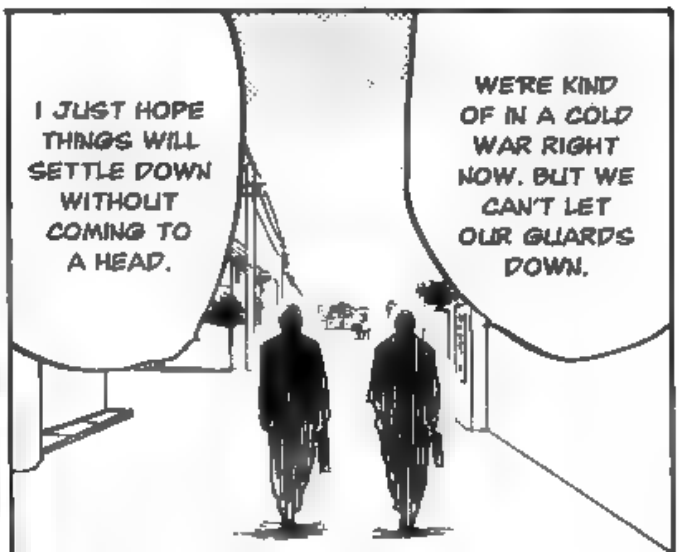
IN THE BATHROOM AGAIN!

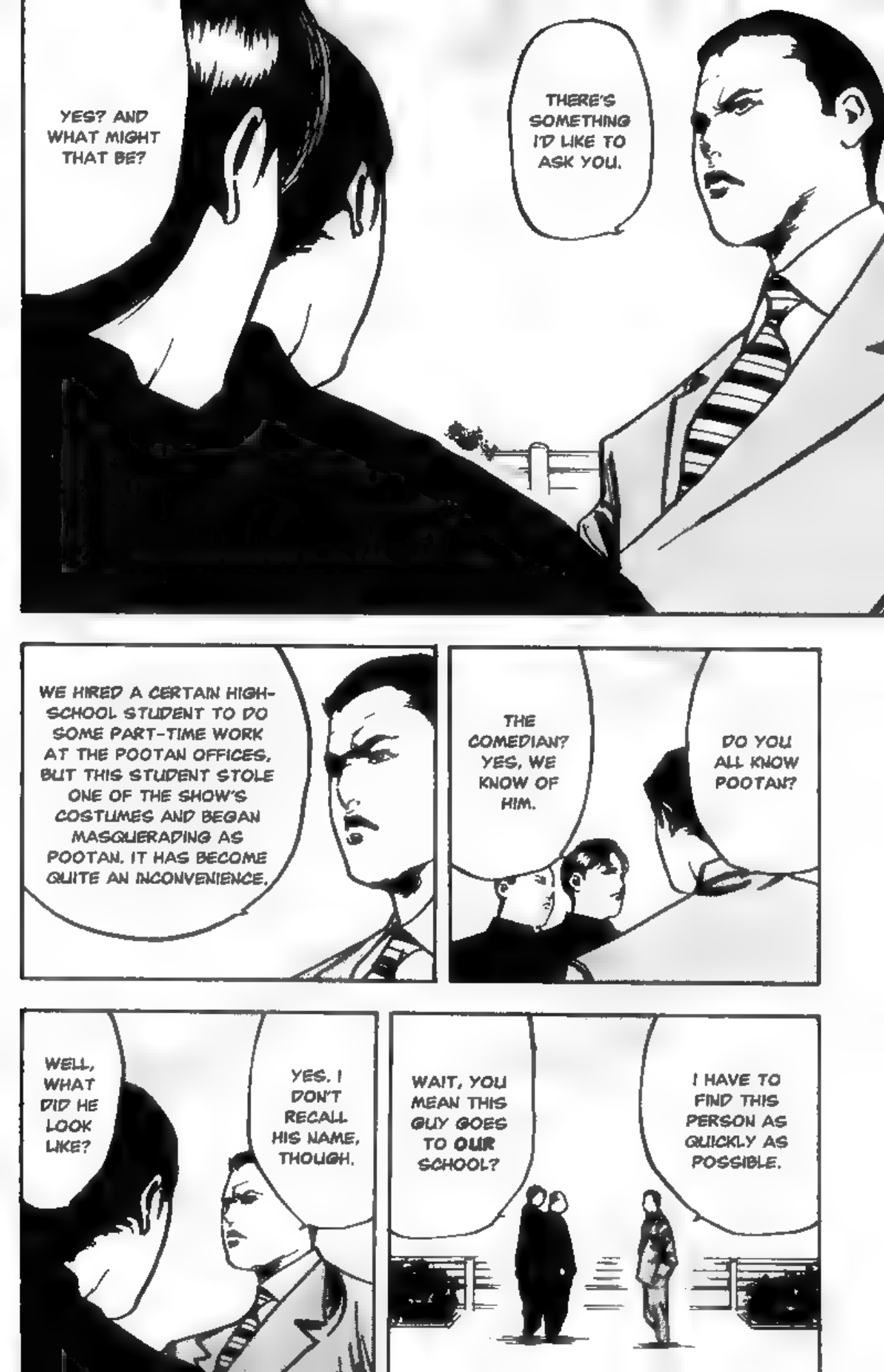
CHAPTER 124: **A KIND OF MAGIC**



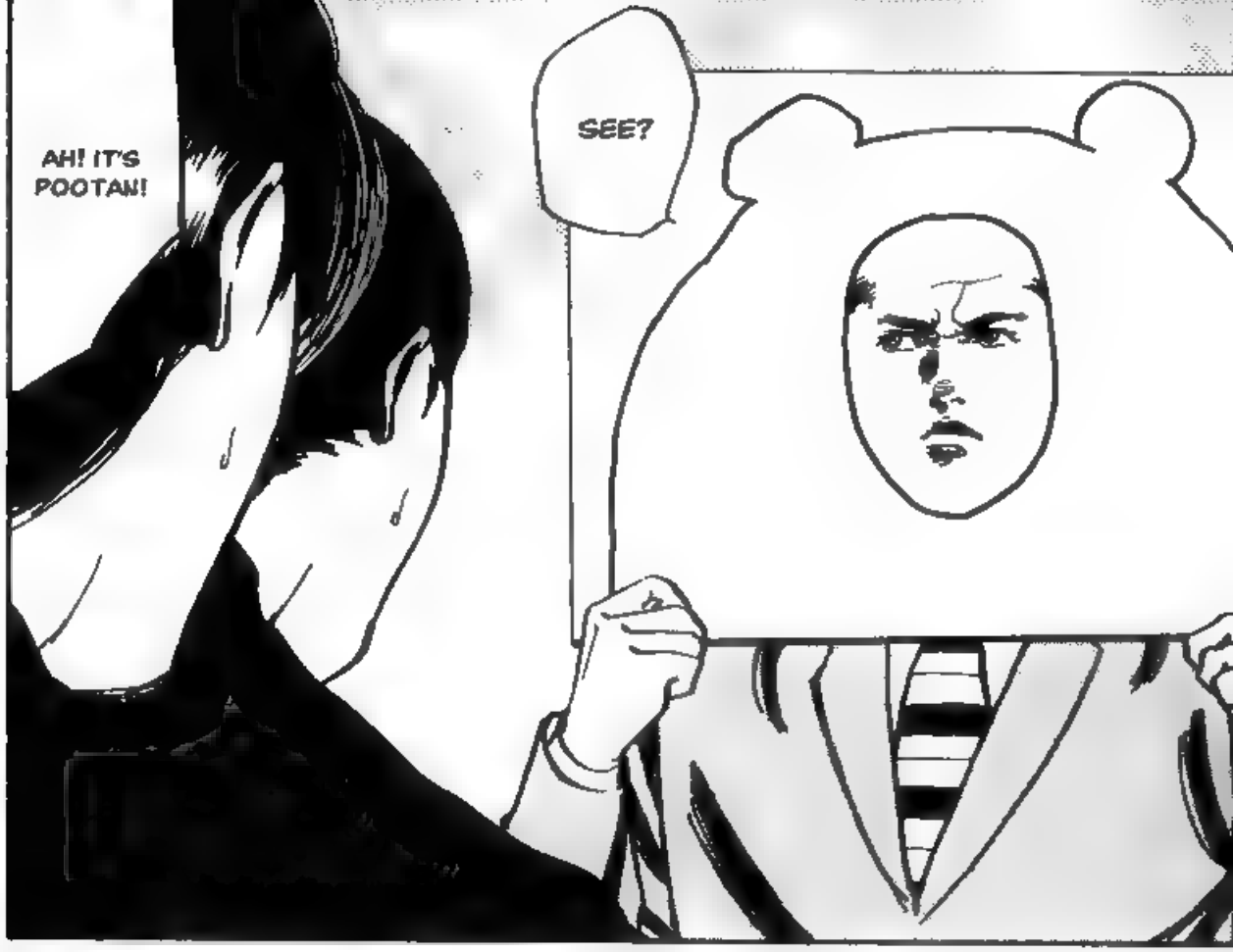
I HAVE BEEN ATTENDING SCHOOL AS USUAL. I BELIEVE IT IS YOU AND SOME OF THE OTHERS THAT HAVE BEEN ABSENT.
I HAVEN'T SEEN YOU IN A WHILE, KAMIYAMA. WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN?


WELL I AM A STUDENT OF THIS SCHOOL. NATURALLY, I'M GOING TO HEAR ABOUT THINGS OF THIS NATURE.
HUH? HOW DID YOU KNOW ABOUT THAT?
INCIDENTALLY, THE RIVALRY WITH SADA AND HIS MEN SEEMS TO HAVE BECOME RATHER INTENSE. HOW ARE THINGS ON THAT END?

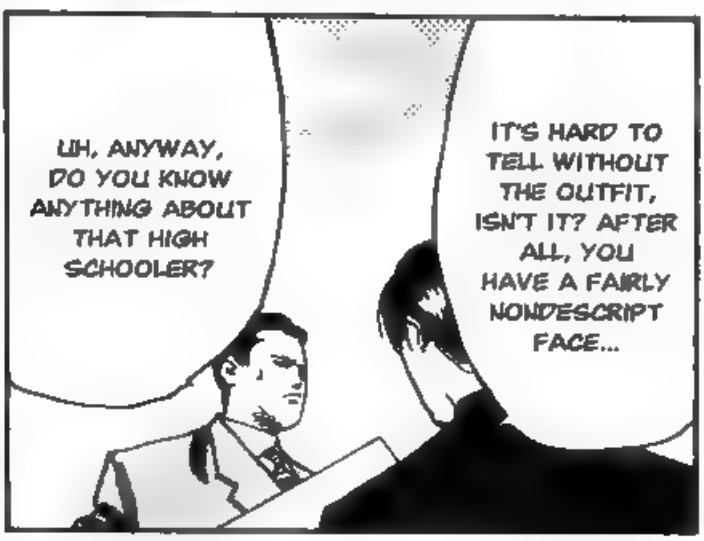

I JUST HOPE THINGS WILL SETTLE DOWN WITHOUT COMING TO A HEAD.
WE'RE KIND OF IN A COLD WAR RIGHT NOW. BUT WE CAN'T LET OUR GUARDS DOWN.


YES? AND WHAT MIGHT THAT BE?
THERE'S SOMETHING I'D LIKE TO ASK YOU.
WE HIRED A CERTAIN HIGH-SCHOOL STUDENT TO DO SOME PART-TIME WORK AT THE POOTAN OFFICES, BUT THIS STUDENT STOLE ONE OF THE SHOW'S COSTUMES AND BEGAN MASQUERADING AS POOTAN. IT HAS BECOME QUITE AN INCONVENIENCE.
THE COMEDIAN? YES, WE KNOW OF HIM.
DO YOU ALL KNOW POOTAN?
WELL, WHAT DID HE LOOK LIKE?
YES. I DON'T RECALL HIS NAME, THOUGH.
WAIT, YOU MEAN THIS GUY GOES TO OUR SCHOOL?
I HAVE TO FIND THIS PERSON AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE.

"HAS A MUSTACHE AND WALKS AROUND WITHOUT A SHIRT, LIKE A PRO WRESTLER"?
HE HAS A MUSTACHE AND WALKS AROUND WITHOUT A SHIRT, LIKE A PRO WRESTLER.
I'VE THOUGHT IT OVER AND I'M TELLING YOU, THAT'S THE KIND OF GUY HE WAS!
NO KIDDING. A HIGH SCHOOLER WHO "WALKS AROUND WITHOUT A SHIRT, LIKE A PRO WRESTLER"? I'VE NEVER SEEN SUCH A THING!
How old are you, anyway?
THERE ARE NO HIGH-SCHOOL STUDENTS LIKE THAT! PLEASE GET A HOLD OF YOURSELF, SIR!
OH! SORRY, I SHOULD HAVE INTRODUCED MYSELF SOONER. I'M POOTAN.
WHO EXACTLY ARE YOU?
BEFORE WE GO ANY FURTHER...
HOLD ON JUST A MOMENT.
YOU DON'T BELIEVE ME, EH?
IS THIS WHAT POOTAN LOOKED LIKE?
WHAT? YOU'RE KIDDING, RIGHT?


AH! IT'S POOTAN!
SEE?

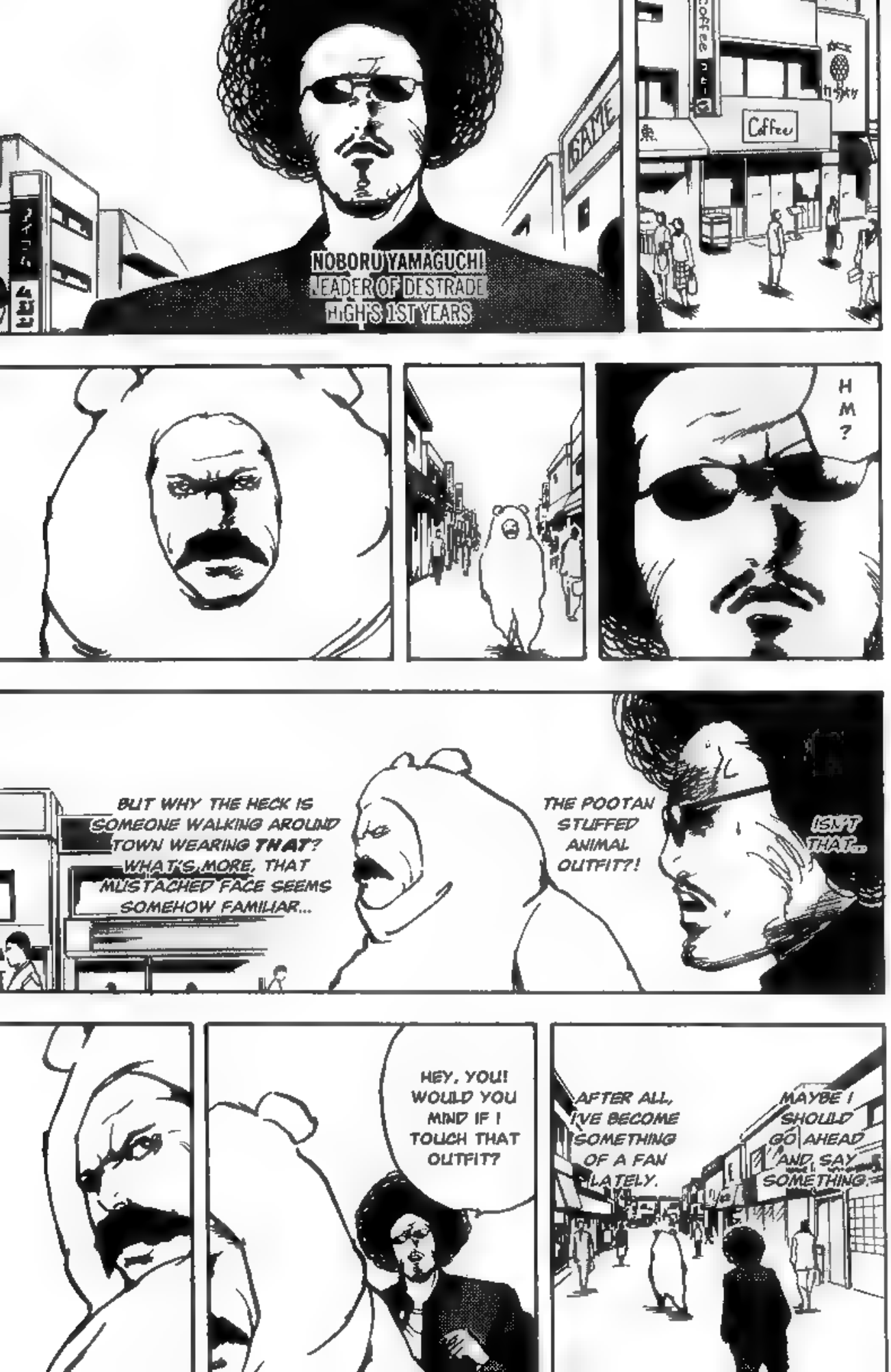
SHALL WE GO ASK HOKUTO-KUN?
NAH, I CAN'T THINK OF ANYONE.

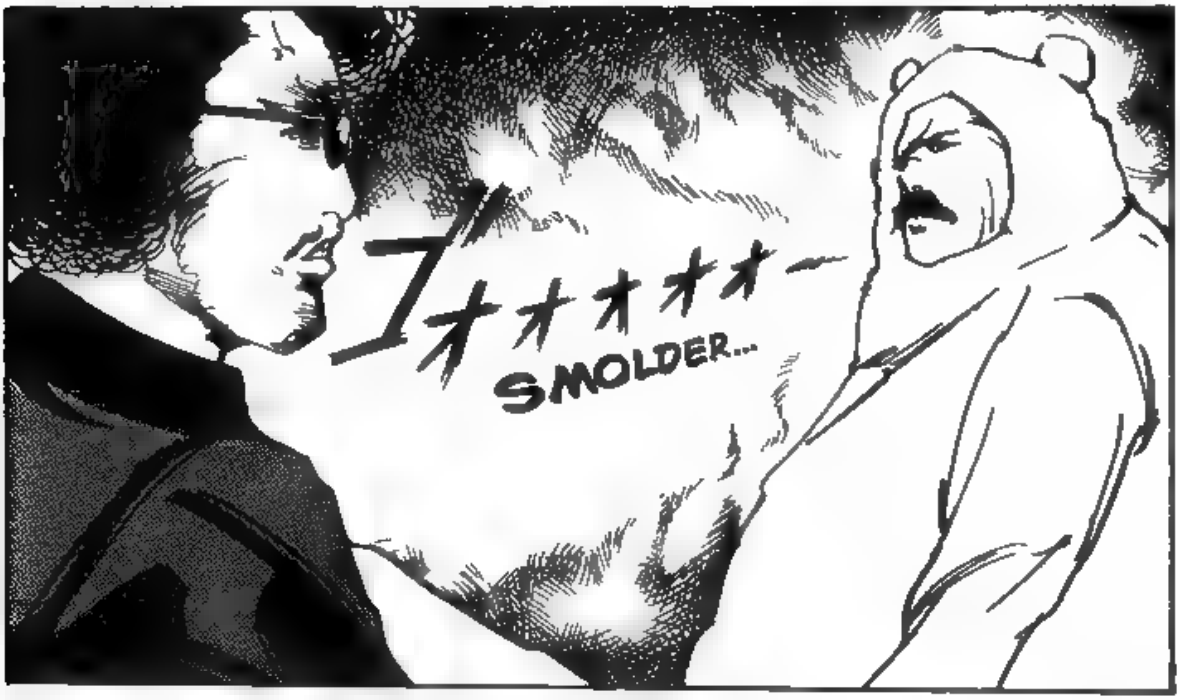

UH, ANYWAY, DO YOU KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT THAT HIGH SCHOOLER?
IT'S HARD TO TELL WITHOUT THE OUTFIT, ISN'T IT? AFTER ALL, YOU HAVE A FAIRLY NONDESCRIPT FACE...

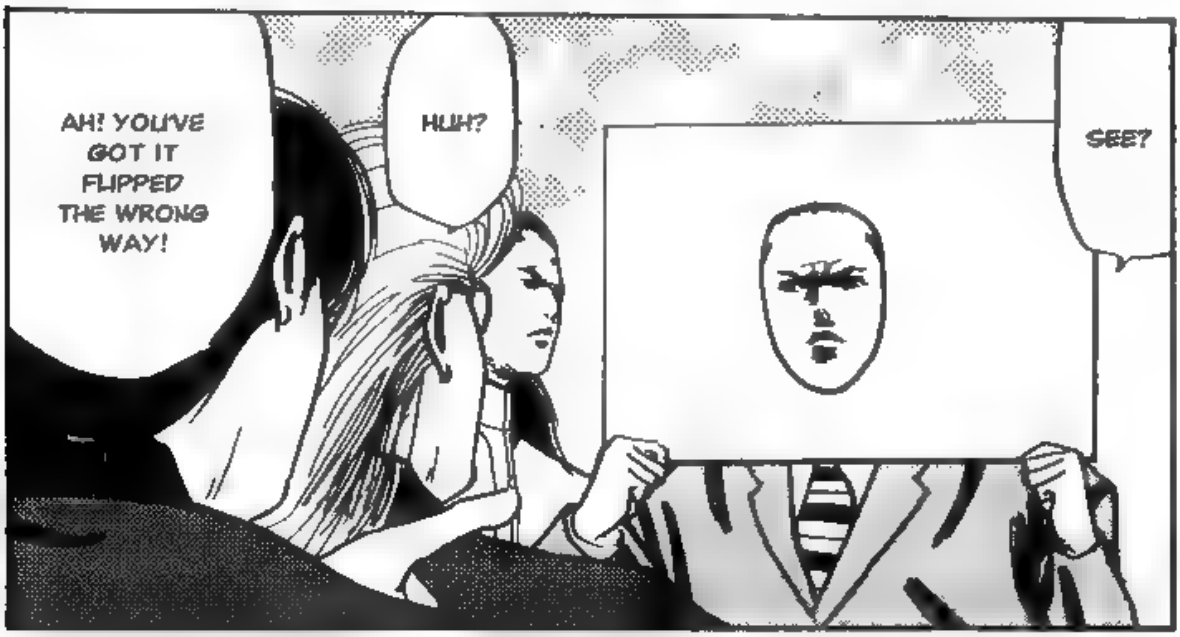
WHAT? A HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT WITH A MUSTACHE?

HE MUST MEAN FREDDIE, RIGHT?
OH, THAT'S RIGHT! FREDDIE! WHY DIDN'T I THINK OF THAT?
PROBABLY BECAUSE WE'VE NEVER ACTUALLY CONSIDERED HIM A CLASSMATE.
I'D LIKE YOU TO GO GET THIS "FREDDIE" RIGHT AWAY! THERE'S NO TIME TO LOSE!
JUST A MOMENT. I UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU'RE SAYING, BUT BEFORE WE PROCEED THERE'S SOMETHING I'D LIKE TO ASK YOU.
YES?
WHO ARE YOU?
OH! SORRY ABOUT THAT. I'M POOTAN.
LIAR! YOURS IS NOT THE FACE OF POOTAN! I'VE SEEN HIM COUNTLESS TIMES ON TELEVISION. I WILL NOT BE FOOLED!
GRR, FINE. HANG ON.
SEE?
AH! IT'S POOTAN!

SASAKI-KUN MIGHT BE ABLE TO TELL YOU.
He's been getting along well with him lately.
I'M AFRAID I DON'T KNOW.
UH, ANYWAY, DO YOU THINK YOU COULD TELL ME WHERE FREDDIE IS NOW?
MY APOLOGIES. YOU HAVE A FAIRLY NONDESCRIPT FACE, AND SINCE YOU WEREN'T WEARING THE OUTFIT, I COULDN'T QUITE TELL.
PLEASE TAKE ME TO WHERE YOU SAW HIM! RIGHT AWAY!
YEAH, I SAW HIM EARLIER. HE WAS WEARING SOME WEIRD ANIMAL OUTFIT.
HUH? FREDDIE?!
WHO THE HECK ARE YOU?
YES?
WHOA, TAKE IT EASY, MAN! I GET WHERE YOU'RE COMING FROM, BUT BEFORE WE GO ON THERE'S SOMETHING I WANNA ASK YA.
GRRR, FINE! JUST GIVE ME A MOMENT!
POOTAN, HUH? THAT AIN'T HOW I REMEMBER HIM LOOKING.
OH! SORRY, I SHOULD HAVE INTRODUCED MYSELF SOONER. I'M POOTAN.


NOBORU YAMAGUCHI
LEADER OF DESTRADE
HIGH'S 1ST YEARS
Coffee
HM?
BUT WHY THE HECK IS SOMEONE WALKING AROUND TOWN WEARING THAT? WHAT'S MORE, THAT MUSTACHED FACE SEEMS SOMEHOW FAMILIAR...
THE POOTAN STUFFED ANIMAL OUTFIT?!
ISN'T THAT...
HEY, YOU! WOULD YOU MIND IF I TOUCH THAT OUTFIT?
AFTER ALL, I'VE BECOME SOMETHING OF A FAN LATELY.
MAYBE I SHOULD GO AHEAD AND SAY SOMETHING.



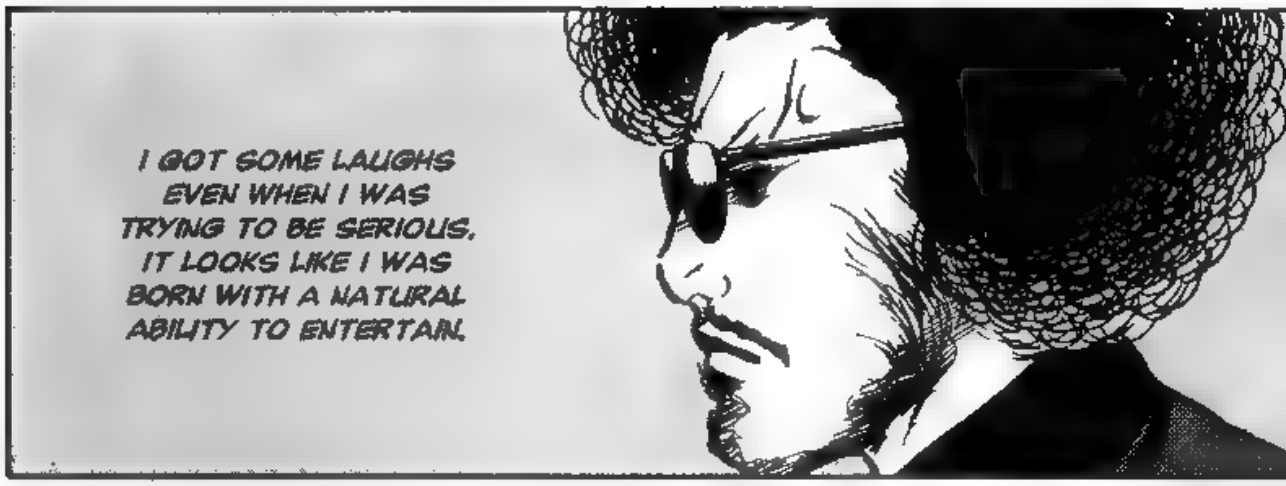


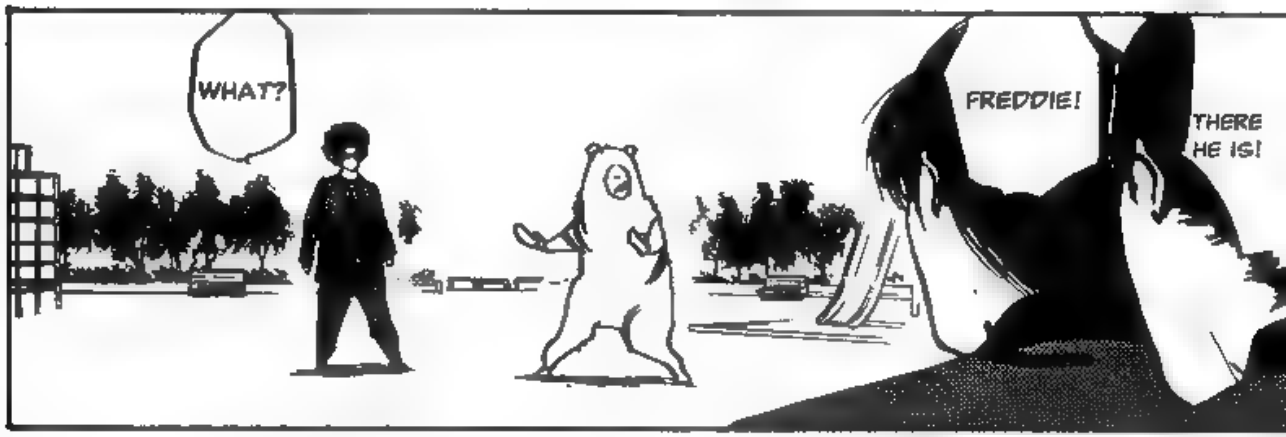
TALK ABOUT A RUN-OF-THE-MILL MANGA GAG!

CHAPTER 125: **UNDER PRESSURE**

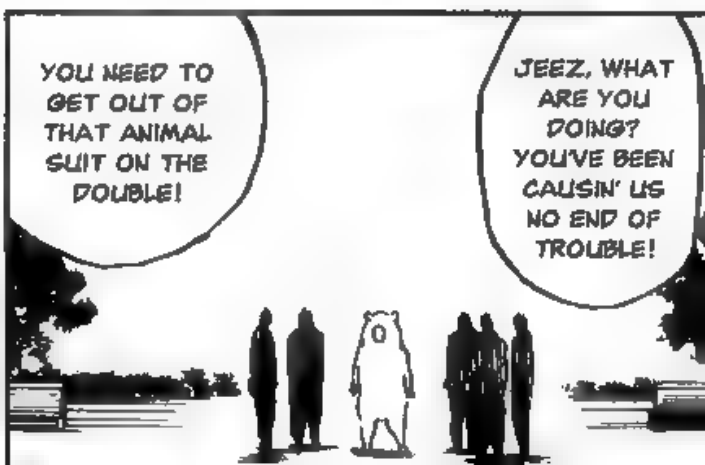
IF PEOPLE THINK THERE'S NOTHIN' MORE TO ME THAN JOKES, THEY'RE IN FOR A BIG SURPRISE. IT'S ABOUT TIME TO SHOW 'EM I'M GOOD AT FIGHTING, TOO.
IT'S OK TO GET WORKED UP LIKE THIS ONCE IN A WHILE.

DAMN!
HA! AWESOME! LET'S GO WATCH!
CHECK IT OUT! HE'S TALKIN' TO A GUY IN AN ANIMAL SUIT!


I GOT SOME LAUGHS EVEN WHEN I WAS TRYING TO BE SERIOUS. IT LOOKS LIKE I WAS BORN WITH A NATURAL ABILITY TO ENTERTAIN.


WHAT?
FREDDIE!
THERE HE IS!

WAIT JUST A MINUTE! WHAT THE HELL IS GOING ON HERE?


YOU NEED TO GET OUT OF THAT ANIMAL SUIT ON THE DOUBLE!
JEEZ, WHAT ARE YOU DOING? YOU'VE BEEN CAUSIN' US NO END OF TROUBLE!

YOU SEE, FREDDIE HERE WAS HIRED TO WORK PART TIME AT THE POOTAN OFFICES, BUT BEFORE ANYONE KNEW IT, HE'D TAKEN ON THE POOTAN PERSONA AND WREAKED HAVOC FOR EVERYONE INVOLVED.
HM?
ALLOW ME TO EXPLAIN.
OK, I FOLLOW YOU, BUT THERE'S STILL ONE THING I'D LIKE TO ASK.
SO THAT'S WHAT WAS GOIN' ON.
I WAS HOPING THAT HE'D AT LEAST RETURN THE OUTFIT.
OH! SORRY, I SHOULD HAVE INTRODUCED MYSELF SOONER. I'M POOTAN.
WHO THE HELL ARE YOU?
YES?
I GUESS I'LL JUST HAVE TO...
ANOTHER UNBELIEVER?! FOR CRYING OUT LOUD!
LIAR! YOU LOOK NOTHING LIKE POOTAN!

AH! IT'S UPSIDE DOWN.
HUH?
SEE?
NOW, IF YOU'LL JUST GIVE THAT BACK...
. . . . . .
IN ANY EVENT, I THINK IT'S ABOUT TIME TO WRAP THIS UP.
WHAT?!
BWAP

WHAT?
ACTUALLY, I BELIEVE THAT YOU ARE PARTIALLY RESPONSIBLE FOR THIS TURN OF EVENTS.
WHY YOU... EVEN NOW, YOU INTEND TO DEFY ME?!
IS IT NOT TRUE THAT THINGS REACHED THIS POINT BECAUSE YOU WERE SO PREOCCUPIED THAT YOU HAD SOMEONE TAKE YOUR PLACE AT YOUR OWN AUTOGRAPH SESSION?
FREDDIE IS AN HONEST AND SINCERE MAN. IN CARRYING OUT THE DUTIES OF HIS JOB, HE MOST PROBABLY BECAME POOTAN IN BOTH HEART AND SOUL.
BUT WHAT AM I SUPPOSED TO DO NOW? HOW DO I GET HIM TO RETURN THAT OUTFIT? PLEASE TELL ME!
I GUESS YOU'RE RIGHT.
. . . . . !
FREDDIE WAS NEVER ANYTHING MORE THAN AN IMPOSTER, WHILE **YOU** ARE THE REAL POOTAN. IF YOU CAN MAKE THAT EXPLICITLY CLEAR TO HIM, I'M SURE HE WILL ACQUIESCE.
THE ANSWER IS SIMPLE.

SURELY THERE MUST BE SOME MANNER OF WISECRACK IN YOUR ARSENAL. A WELL-PLACED "BADA-BING!" FOR EXAMPLE.

YOU MEAN, LIKE, FIRE OFF A JOKE OR SOME-THING?
YOU'RE A PROFES-SIONAL PERFORMER, YES? THEN SHOW US.

HUH?!
LIES! BUT I KNOW THE TRUTH.

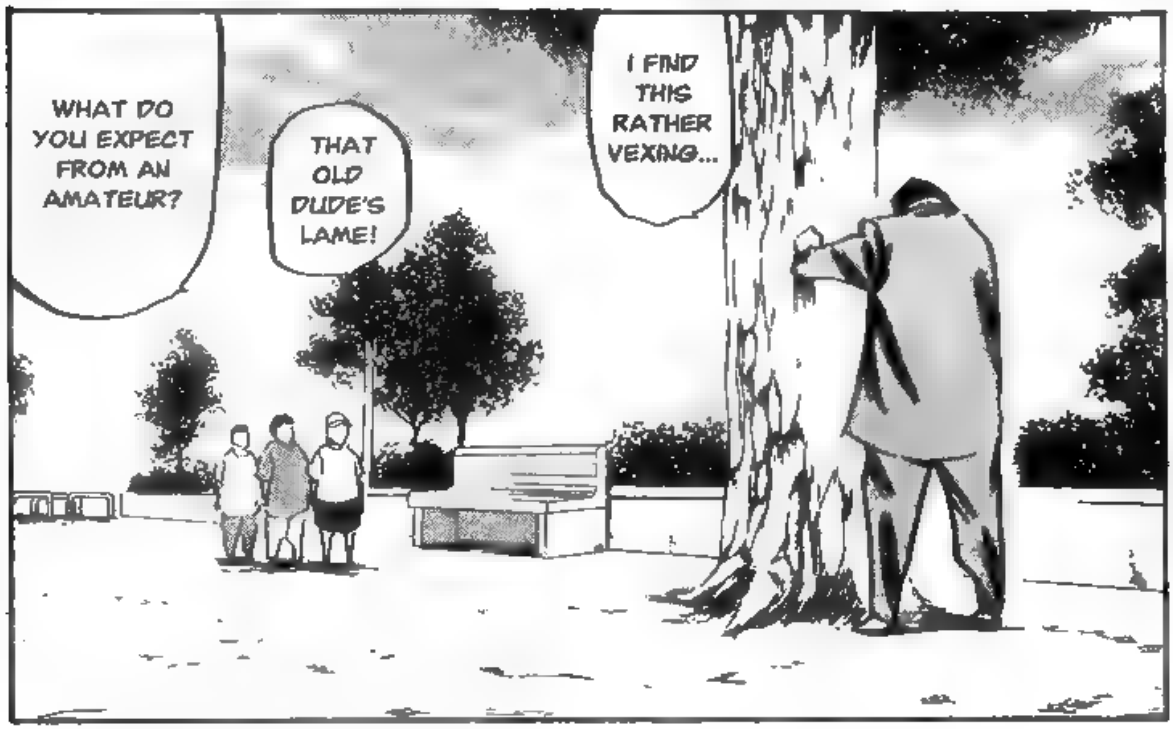
BUT I... I DON'T REALLY USE ONE-LINERS...

BUT IT DIDN'T WORK OUT FOR YOU, DID IT? YOU HIT THE PROVERBIAL WALL...AND THAT'S WHEN YOU SWITCHED OVER TO THE "POOTAN" ROUTINE AND FOUND SUCCESS.
BACK WHEN YOU FIRST DEBUTED AND HADN'T MADE IT BIG YET, YOU USED TO USE ONE-LINERS ALL THE TIME.

PLACE YOUR HAND ON YOUR FORE-HEAD .
LIKE THIS, YES?

I'M KINDA FUZZY ON THE...NO, IT'S NO GOOD! I FORGOT, ALRIGHT?!
USE YOUR CATCH-PHRASE OF OLD.

EVERY TIME THEY AIR SPECIALS OF ME FROM MY OLDER DAYS, IT MAKES ME BREAK OUT IN A COLD SWEAT!
YOU DON'T LIKE LOOKIN' BACK ON YOUR PAST, HUH? I CAN RELATE.
S-STOP! IT'S EMBARRASSING ENOUGH REMEMBERING THAT, LET ALONE DOING IT!
YOU DON'T APPEAR TO SENSE THE URGENCY OF YOUR SITUATION, BUT THIS IS A PIVOTAL MOMENT FOR YOU--IT IS THE INSTANT IN WHICH YOU EITHER KEEP OR LOSE YOUR POSITION AS POOTAN!
WH-WHAT?
IF YOU FEEL ASHAMED OF THAT SORT OF THING, IT WOULD SEEM YOUR PATH AS A PERFORMER HAS BECOME CLEARER.
ALRIGHT, YOU'VE OPENED MY EYES! I'M GONNA GO BACK TO BASICS AND GIVE YOU A TASTE OF MY OLD ROUTINE!
I SEE.
WHY NOT TRY RETURNING TO YOUR ROOTS, JUST THIS ONCE? IF YOU ABANDON YOUR FEAR OF SHAME, YOU SHOULD COME OUT OF THE EXPERIENCE A BETTER PERFORMER.
I SURE AM! YOU JUST SIT BACK AND GET READY TO LAUGH!
ARE YOU REALLY GOING TO DO THIS?



YEAH, THAT'S NOT SO FUNNY.

A HAPHAZARD INTRODUCTION TO THE CHARACTERS

TAKASHI KAMIYAMA

Known as "the honors student," Kamiyama is the protagonist of our story. Or rather, he should be. The fact that he will be absent for long stretches and yet the narrative can continue without a hitch has been a cause of recent consternation. He was once absent for two full months... and yet he is the protagonist. In truth, the more that Kamiyama is pushed into the background, the more power and influence he amasses. The 1st years that rally around him may well end up becoming a sort of "Kamiyama Corps"! I kind of miss the old Kamiyama, the one who, back when our story first began, used to freak all these hoods out.

SHINJIRO HAYASHIDA

Known as "Mr. Perfect Idiot," Hayashida is in his own way among the elite of Cromartie High. His dizzying absurdity is so masterfully refined that no one could possibly keep up with him. Whenever you hear that "Wait a second" and Hayashida puts in his two cents, you can rest assured that the conversation is going to get kicked up (or would that be down?) a couple notches. Of course, all our wonderfully enlightened readers are already aware of this.

AKIRA MAEDA

Known as "the Dragon of Razors." Not that anyone actually calls him that. As Cromartie's most straightforward character, Maeda rises farther above the others with each passing day. He has the important task of teaching the younger readers that doing the right thing isn't always the right way to go, a dilemma we tend to face as adults. When all you youngsters out there settle down and become company employees, you'll finally understand the depths of Maeda's sorrow! (LOL)

A HAPHAZARD INTRODUCTION TO THE CHARACTERS

FREDDIE

Known as...actually, I still can't figure out who this guy is! (LOL) He's really warmed up to everyone now, as opposed to how he was when he first appeared. Where once he was feared, Freddie is now loved and adored by all. The only things we know for sure are that he's apparently a good singer and his blood type is B. Whether or not he's even a high-school student remains unclear. I wonder if that's OK.

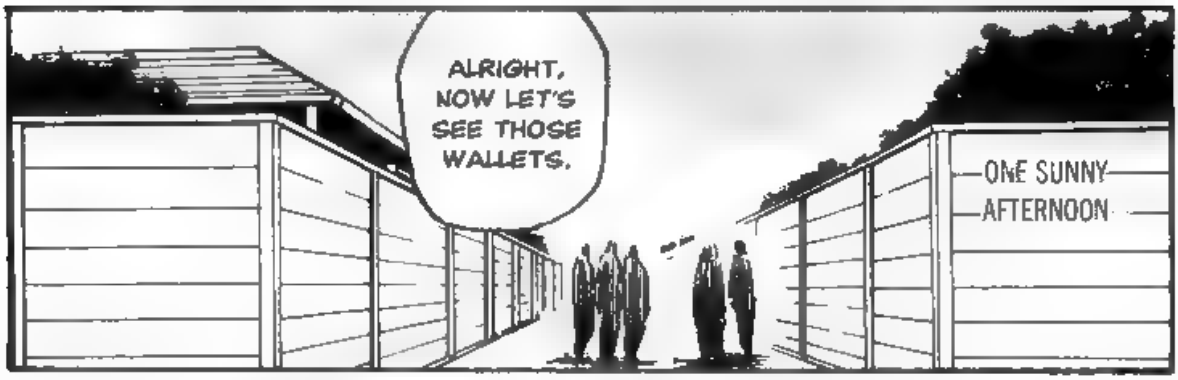
TAKESHI HOKUTO

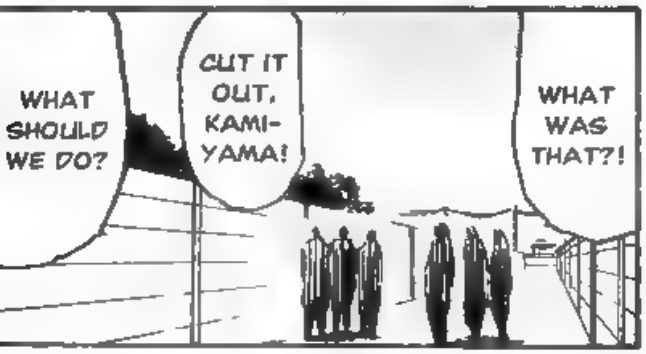
Hokuto was born into a wealthy family and is the leader of the Hokuto Corps, which (to the shock of our readers) was revealed in the last volume to actually exist. His goal of controlling all the high schools in Japan--something so absurd that it could only appear in a manga--is now a thing of the past. He has settled down quite a bit, but I actually get the feeling he's becoming more and more irresponsible. Hokuto is known as "the strongest fighter of impossible battles." And no wisecracks as to why he's the only one wearing a white uniform!

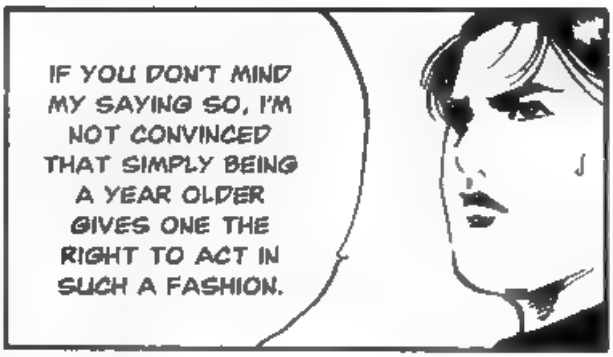
HOKUTO'S HENCHMAN

Known as "Hokuto's Henchman." (LOL) I mean, there's nothing else to call him! In the last volume, he put himself on the line to try to prevent a split in the Hokuto Corps. At least, that's how it looked. Though he has yet to reveal his name, this particular henchman occupies an unexpectedly choice position in the manga. What's more, he is (narratively speaking) rather convenient, so he tends to show up in the story a lot. How long can this poor fellow continue to remain nameless? (LOL)

CHAPTER 126: **WATCH THAT MAN**



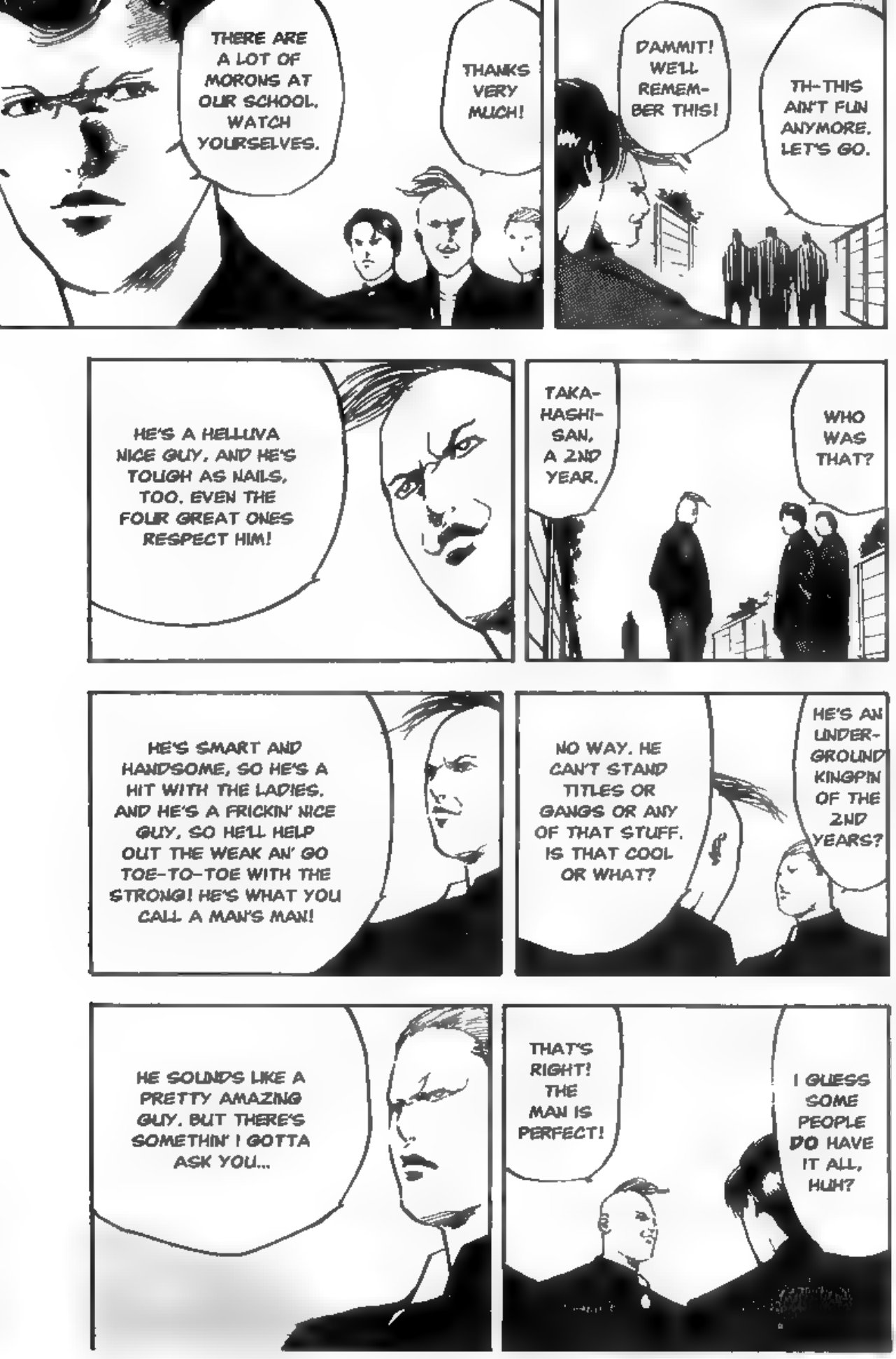




TAKA-
HASHI!
YOU PUNKS GET A KICK OUT OF BULLYING UNDER-CLASSMEN, DO YOU?
HIDEKI TAKAHASHI
ROMARTIE HIGH SCHOOL
2ND-YEAR STUDENT

IT'S THREE-TO-ONE, MAN! WE CAN TAKE HIM!
BASTARD! I'VE HAD IT WITH YOU FLAPPIN' YOUR MOUTH ALL THE TIME!

YOU THINK THE THREE OF YOU COULD BEAT ME, DO YOU? WHAT A JOKE. YOU MUST BE IN A HURRY TO GET YOUR HEADS SMASHED IN.

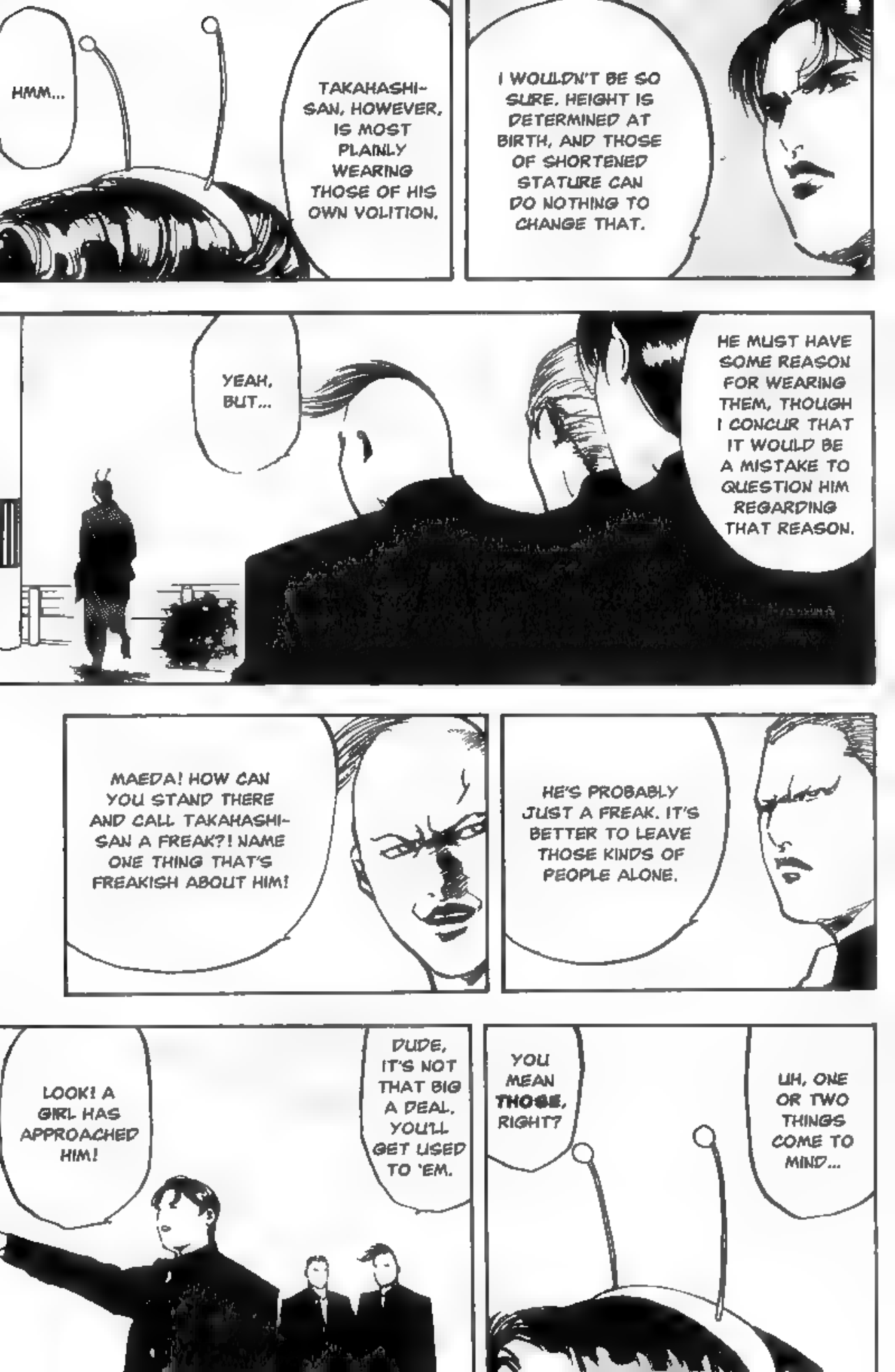

THERE ARE A LOT OF MORONS AT OUR SCHOOL. WATCH YOURSELVES.
THANKS VERY MUCH!
D'AMMIT! WE'LL REMEMBER THIS!
TH-THIS AIN'T FUN ANYMORE. LET'S GO.
HE'S A HELLUVA NICE GUY. AND HE'S TOUGH AS NAILS, TOO. EVEN THE FOUR GREAT ONES RESPECT HIM!
TAKAHASHI-SAN, A 2ND YEAR.
WHO WAS THAT?
HE'S SMART AND HANDSOME, SO HE'S A HIT WITH THE LADIES. AND HE'S A FRICKIN' NICE GUY, SO HE'LL HELP OUT THE WEAK AN' GO TOE-TO-TOE WITH THE STRONG! HE'S WHAT YOU CALL A MAN'S MAN!
NO WAY. HE CAN'T STAND TITLES OR GANGS OR ANY OF THAT STUFF. IS THAT COOL OR WHAT?
HE'S AN UNDERGROUND KINGPIN OF THE 2ND YEARS?
HE SOUNDS LIKE A PRETTY AMAZING GUY. BUT THERE'S SOMETHIN' I GOTTA ASK YOU...
THAT'S RIGHT! THE MAN IS PERFECT!
I GUESS SOME PEOPLE DO HAVE IT ALL, HUH?

WHAT ARE THOSE?
YEAH?

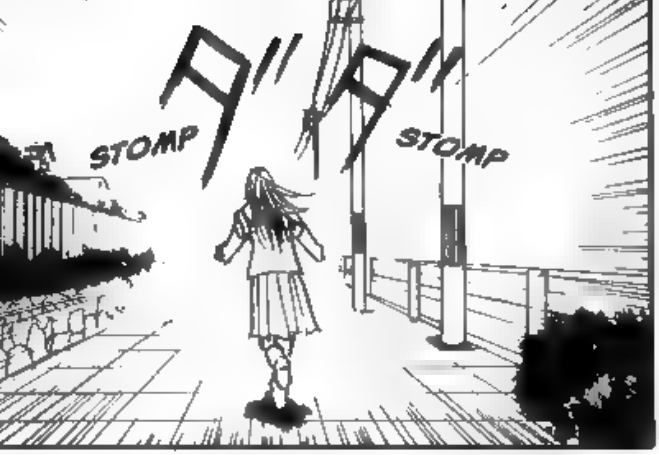
WELL, WHY DON'T YOU GO ASK HIM?
HECK IF I KNOW.

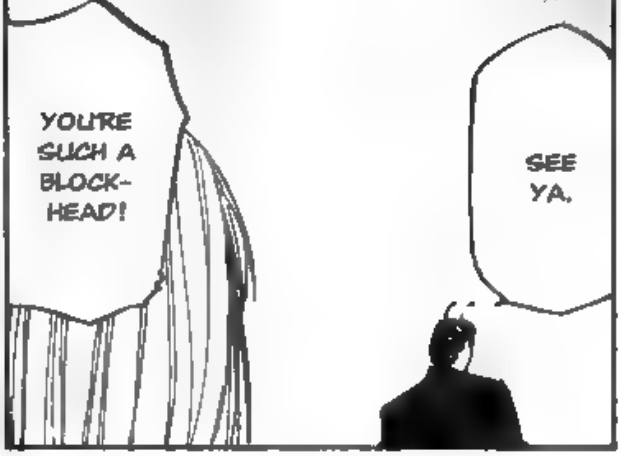
.....

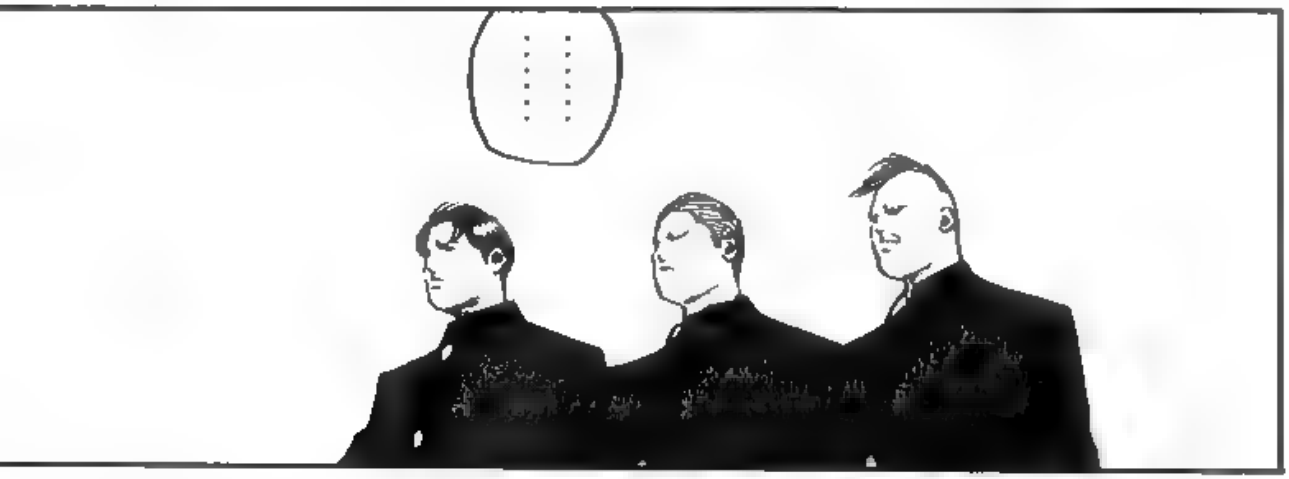
YOU WOULDN'T GO UP TO SOME SHORT DUDE AND GO, "DUDE, HOW COME YOU'RE SO SHORT?" WOULD YOU? IT'S THE SAME THING!
I CAN'T ASK HIM ABOUT SOMETHIN' LIKE THAT!


HMM...
TAKAHASHI-SAN, HOWEVER, IS MOST PLAINLY WEARING THOSE OF HIS OWN VOLITION.
I WOULDN'T BE SO SURE. HEIGHT IS DETERMINED AT BIRTH, AND THOSE OF SHORTENED STATURE CAN DO NOTHING TO CHANGE THAT.
YEAH, BUT...
HE MUST HAVE SOME REASON FOR WEARING THEM, THOUGH I CONCUR THAT IT WOULD BE A MISTAKE TO QUESTION HIM REGARDING THAT REASON.
MAEDA! HOW CAN YOU STAND THERE AND CALL TAKAHASHI-SAN A FREAK?! NAME ONE THING THAT'S FREAKISH ABOUT HIM!
HE'S PROBABLY JUST A FREAK. IT'S BETTER TO LEAVE THOSE KINDS OF PEOPLE ALONE.
LOOK! A GIRL HAS APPROACHED HIM!
DUDE, IT'S NOT THAT BIG A DEAL. YOU'LL GET USED TO 'EM.
YOU MEAN **THOSE**, RIGHT?
UH, ONE OR TWO THINGS COME TO MIND...

NO! THERE'S NO WAY I'M BREAKING UP!
IF YOU HATE ME SO MUCH THEN LET'S JUST BREAK UP.
. . . . . .
THERE'S JUST ONE THING I CAN'T STAND! I'VE TOLD YOU THIS OVER AND OVER AGAIN!
I LOVE EVERYTHING ABOUT YOU! YOUR PERSONALITY, THE WAY YOU ACT, THE WAY YOU LIVE YOUR LIFE... EVERYTHING!
LISTEN VERY CAREFULLY: EVEN MY FAULTS ARE A PART OF WHO I AM. IF YOU CAN'T ACCEPT THAT, THE ONLY THING TO DO IS TO BREAK UP WITH ME.
BUT WHY WON'T YOU DO ANYTHING ABOUT YOURS?! IT'D BE SO EASY!
I'M ONLY HUMAN. EVERYONE'S GOT THEIR FAULTS, YOU KNOW.


STOMP
STOMP


YOU'RE SUCH A BLOCK-HEAD!
SEE YA.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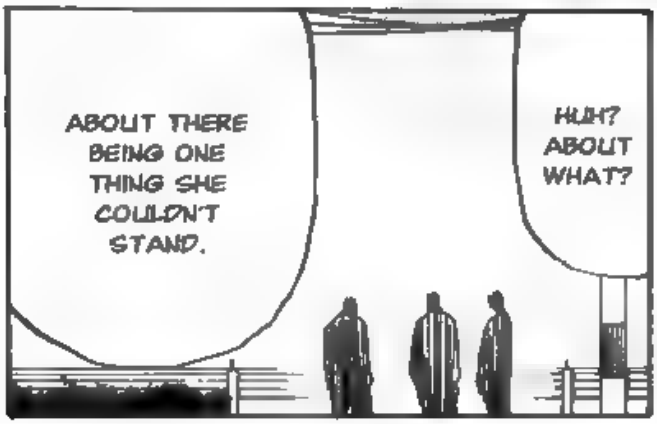
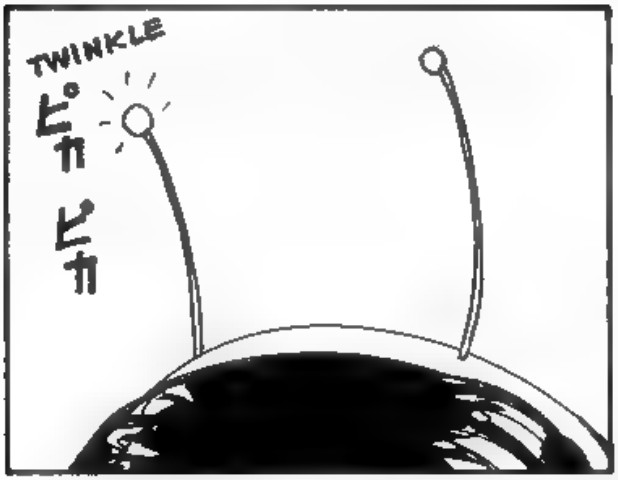
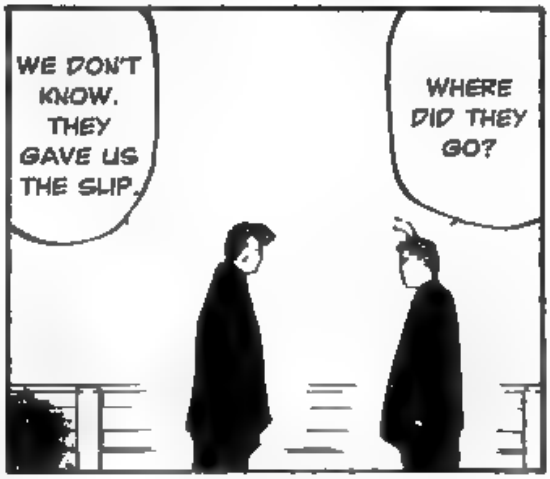

ABOUT THERE BEING ONE THING SHE COULDN'T STAND.
HUH? ABOUT WHAT?

HEY... WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT THAT?

IT COULD'VE BEEN ABOUT SOMETHIN' COMPLETELY DIFFERENT. THERE'S LOTS OF ISSUES THAT COUPLES HAVE GOTTA FACE, Y'KNOW.
HER WORDS WERE A LITTLE VAGUE.

I DON'T KNOW... IT'S A TOUGH CALL.
DON'T YOU THINK SHE MEANT THOSE?





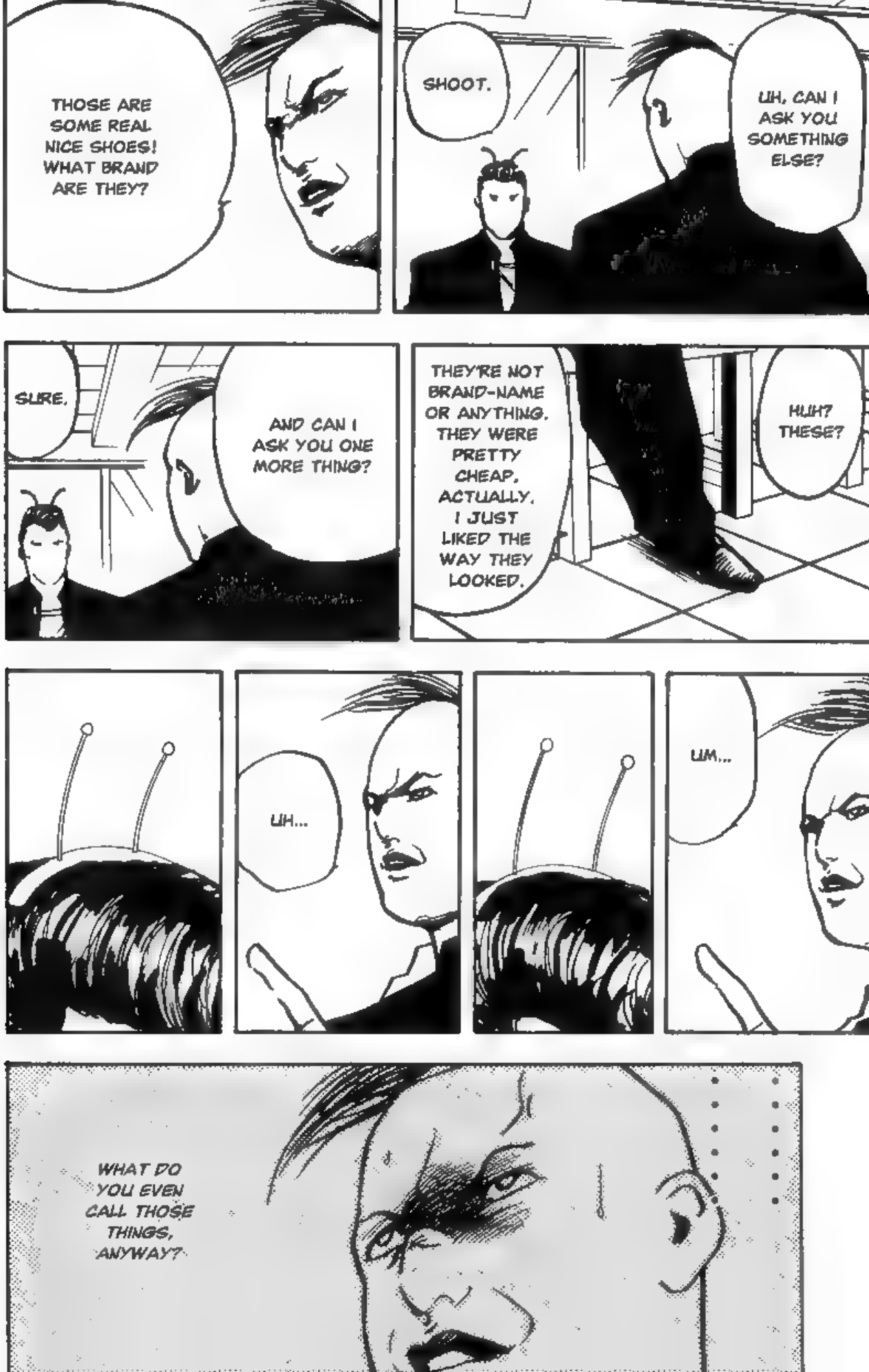
THEY SURE DID!

CHAPTER 127: **SENSE OF DOUBT**

WHAT CAN I GET FOR YOU?
WEL-COME!
COFFEE
COFFEE. BLACK.
YES.
TAKA-HASHI-SAN IS AS COOL AS ALWAYS.
YEAH. EXCEPT...
HE EVEN LOOKS COOL JUST SITTING THERE DRINKIN' HIS COFFEE!
HE'S ALWAYS ALONE, LIKE A LONE WOLF OR SOMETHING.

SIP
ズー
THOSE THINGS ARE STILL BUGGING ME.
OH, YEAH? HOW ARE YOU GONNA ASK HIM?
I CAN'T TAKE IT ANYMORE. I'M GONNA ASK HIM WHAT THEY'RE FOR!
THEY'RE BUGGING ME SO MUCH THAT I COULDN'T SLEEP A WINK LAST NIGHT.
I BELIEVE IT WOULD BE PRUDENT TO BEGIN WITH A LEAD-IN, SOMETHING AMONG THE LINES OF "THAT IS A STYLISH UNIFORM" OR "WHAT BRAND ARE THOSE SHOES?"
INDEED. FOR A QUERY OF THAT MAGNITUDE, THE DIRECT APPROACH IS OUT OF THE QUESTION.

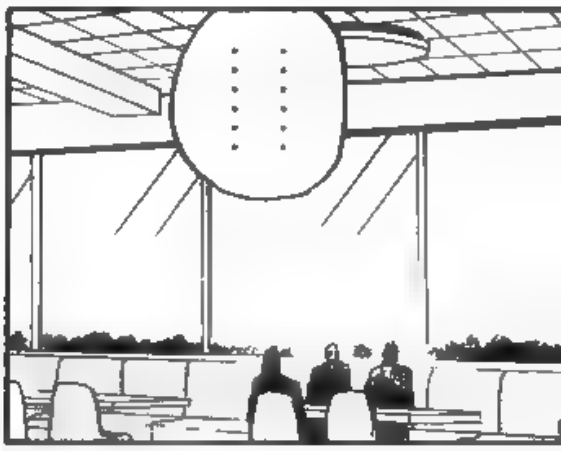
HM?
TAKA-HASHI-SAN!
HEY, YEAH. THAT'S A GOOD PLAN.
GREAT THINKING, KAMIYAMA! TELL YA WHAT, I'LL ASK HIM!
OH, WE'RE NOT REALLY... I MEAN, WE'VE ALREADY FORGOTTEN ABOUT THAT.
THAT LITTLE INCIDENT ASIDE, THOSE OTHER GUYS AREN'T SO BAD.
OH, IT'S YOU ALL.
THANKS FOR YOUR HELP YESTER-DAY!
OK! IF YOU DON'T MIND THEN HERE GOES!
WELL, ASK AWAY.
ANYWAY, UM, I HOPE YOU DON'T MIND ME ASKIN' YOU THIS OUT OF THE BLUE, BUT THERE'S SOMETHING THAT'S BEEN ON MY MIND FOR A WHILE NOW...
WHAT, THIS CHEAP OLD THING? I HAD THE LOCAL TAILOR MAKE IT FOR ME.
THAT'S A PRETTY COOL SCHOOL UNIFORM! WAS IT CUSTOM MADE OR SOMETHING?


THOSE ARE SOME REAL NICE SHOES! WHAT BRAND ARE THEY?
SHOOT.
UH, CAN I ASK YOU SOMETHING ELSE?
SURE.
AND CAN I ASK YOU ONE MORE THING?
THEY'RE NOT BRAND-NAME OR ANYTHING. THEY WERE PRETTY CHEAP, ACTUALLY. I JUST LIKED THE WAY THEY LOOKED.
HUH? THESE?
UH...
UM...
WHAT DO YOU EVEN CALL THOSE THINGS, ANYWAY?

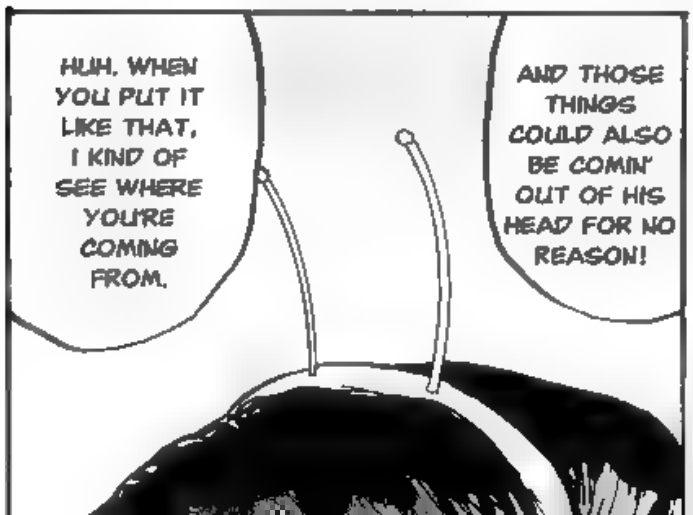
WHAT ARE?
THOSE ARE PRETTY NICE, TOO!
UM
SURE. SEE YA.
IF YOU'LL EXCUSE ME.
. . . . . .
HUH. YOU'VE GOT A POINT THERE.
Those things
I MEAN, I DON'T EVEN KNOW WHAT THOSE THINGS ARE CALLED!
I COULDN'T DO IT.
WELL?
HUH?
JUST A MOMENT. IT COULD BE THAT THERE IS A BASIC FLAW IN OUR REASONING.
I HAVEN'T BEEN TO SHIBUYA LATELY, SO I COULDN'T SAY FOR SURE. I DON'T THINK THEY ARE, THOUGH.
YOU THINK THEY'RE A NEW TREND FROM SHIBUYA OR SOMETHING?

BUT COULD IT NOT ALSO BE POSSIBLE THAT THEY'RE GROWING OUT OF HIS HEAD?
WE'VE BEEN TALKING ABOUT THEM AS IF THEY'RE SOME FORM OF FASHION ACCESSORY...

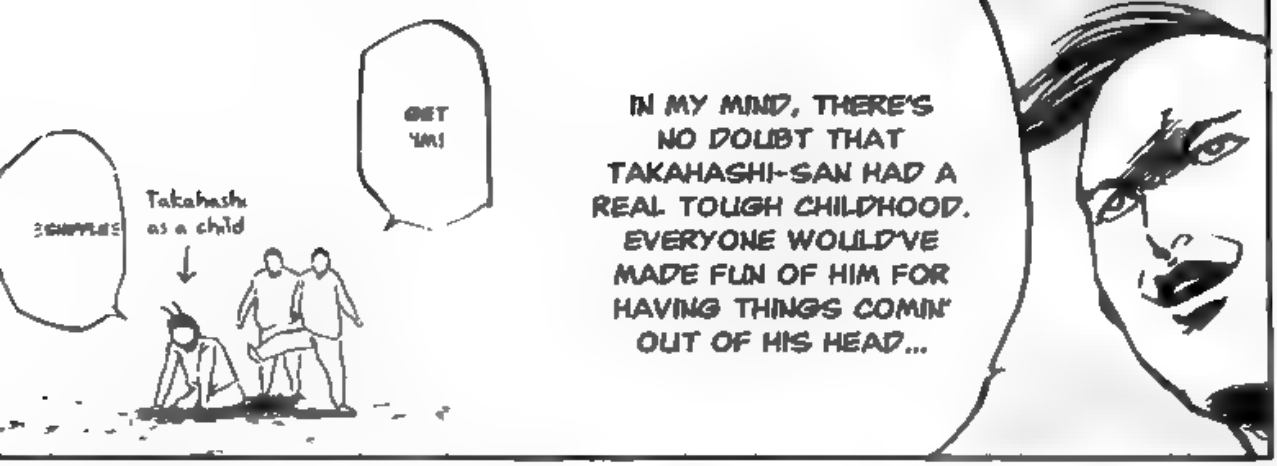
YOU CAN?!
YEAH, I COULD SEE THAT.


. . . . . .

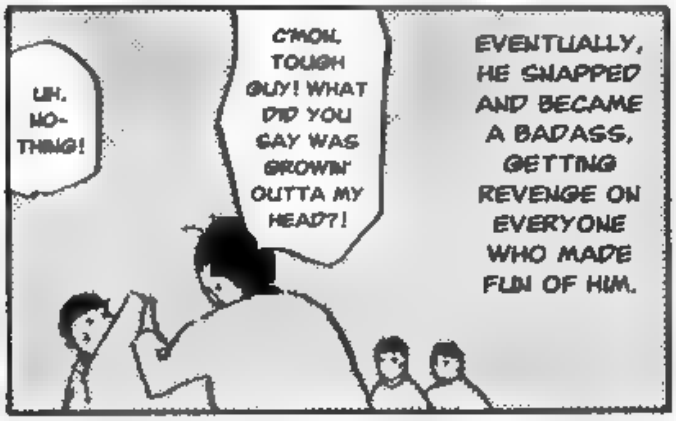
LIKE, SOMETIMES A SINGLE HAIR WILL GROW OUT OF A MOLE, RIGHT? WHAT THE HECK DO YOU THINK THAT MEANS?
DUDE, THE HUMAN BODY'S GOT ALL KINDS OF SECRETS THAT SCIENCE ISN'T CLOSE TO EXPLAINING YET!

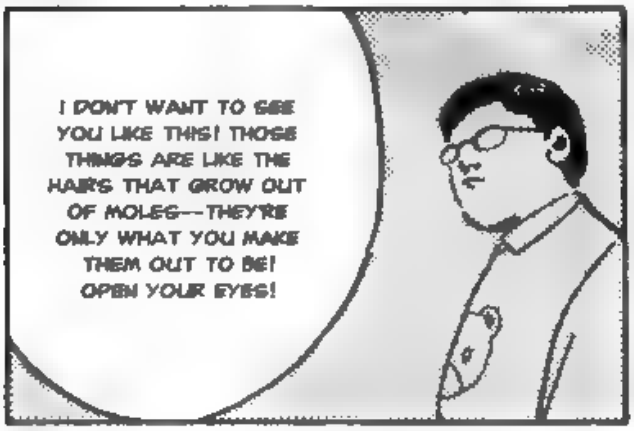

HUH. WHEN YOU PUT IT LIKE THAT, I KIND OF SEE WHERE YOU'RE COMING FROM.
AND THOSE THINGS COULD ALSO BE COMIN' OUT OF HIS HEAD FOR NO REASON!

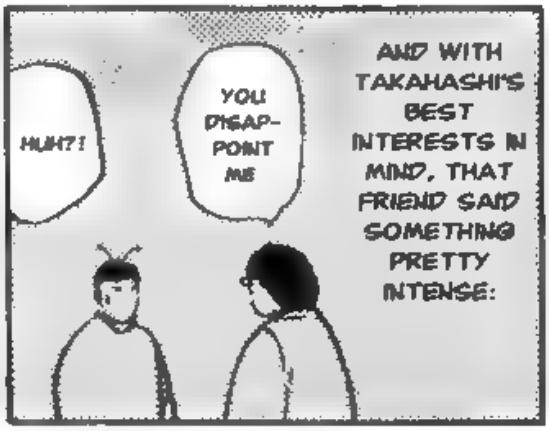
EXACTLY! IT DOESN'T MEAN A THING!
WELL... I DON'T THINK IT MEANS ANY-THING.


GET 'IM!
SNIFFLES
Takahashi as a child
IN MY MIND, THERE'S NO DOUBT THAT TAKAHASHI-SAN HAD A REAL TOUGH CHILDHOOD. EVERYONE WOULD'VE MADE FUN OF HIM FOR HAVING THINGS COMIN' OUT OF HIS HEAD...

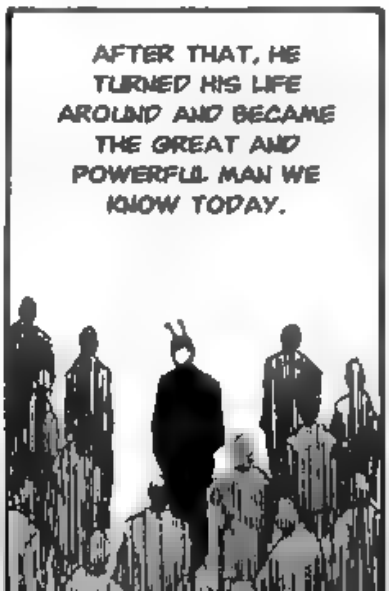
HUH?
IT WAS THEN THAT AN OLD FRIEND AP-PEARED...


UH, NO-THING!
C'MON, TOUGH GUY! WHAT DID YOU SAY WAS GROWIN' OUTTA MY HEAD?!
EVENTUALLY, HE SNAPPED AND BECAME A BADASS, GETTING REVENGE ON EVERYONE WHO MADE FUN OF HIM.


I DON'T WANT TO SEE YOU LIKE THIS! THOSE THINGS ARE LIKE THE HAIRS THAT GROW OUT OF MOLES--THEY'RE ONLY WHAT YOU MAKE THEM OUT TO BE! OPEN YOUR EYES!


HUH?!
YOU DISAP-POINT ME
AND WITH TAKAHASHI'S BEST INTERESTS IN MIND, THAT FRIEND SAID SOMETHING PRETTY INTENSE:

. . . . . .
THAT'S HOW I SEE IT.

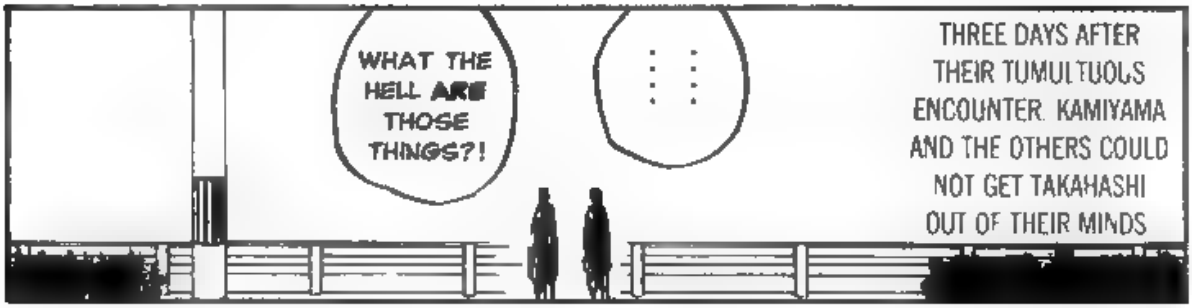

AFTER THAT, HE TURNED HIS LIFE AROUND AND BECAME THE GREAT AND POWERFUL MAN WE KNOW TODAY.

THERE IS NOTHING COMING OUT OF MY HEAD NOTHING!
THE YOUNG TAKAHASHI LEARNED TO BRING HIS DARK SIDE UNDER CONTROL.

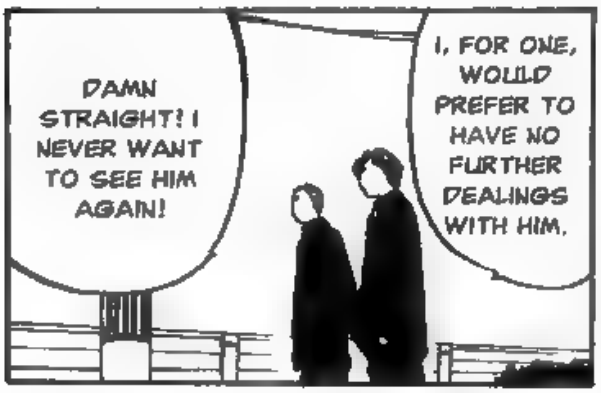
THEN WE SHOULD JUST DROP IT. TAKAHASHI-SAN PROBABLY WOULDN'T WANNA TALK ABOUT SOMETHIN' LIKE THAT.
THAT'S A PRETTY RIDICULOUS STORY, BUT SOMEHOW IT ALL MAKES SENSE!

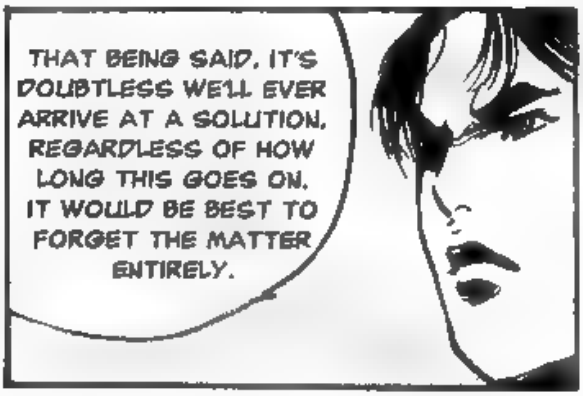
HE CAN TAKE THEM OFF?!

CHAPTER 128: **I DO IT FOR YOU**


WHAT THE HELL **ARE** THOSE THINGS?!
THREE DAYS AFTER THEIR TUMULTUOUS ENCOUNTER, KAMIYAMA AND THE OTHERS COULD NOT GET TAKAHASHI OUT OF THEIR MINDS

INDEED. ONE THING IS FOR CERTAIN--I CAN NO LONGER VIEW TAKAHASHI-SAN AS A "NORMAL" HUMAN BEING.
IT'S REALLY BUGGING ME! SOMETIMES, IF I THINK ABOUT THEM TOO MUCH, I CAN'T EVEN GET TO SLEEP!




THAT BEING SAID, IT'S DOUBTLESS WE'LL EVER ARRIVE AT A SOLUTION, REGARDLESS OF HOW LONG THIS GOES ON. IT WOULD BE BEST TO FORGET THE MATTER ENTIRELY.

NO WAY!
IT'S THEM!

NOT TO SOUND LIKE I'M CRACKIN' A JOKE, BUT I THINK HE DROPPED THEM, MAYBE
BUT WHAT ARE THEY DOING HERE?

YES, BUT DON'T YOU THINK THAT COULD PROVE RATHER AWKWARD?
A POLICE STATION? WE ALREADY KNOW WHO THEY BELONG TO! IT'D BE BETTER JUST TO GIVE THEM BACK OURSELVES.

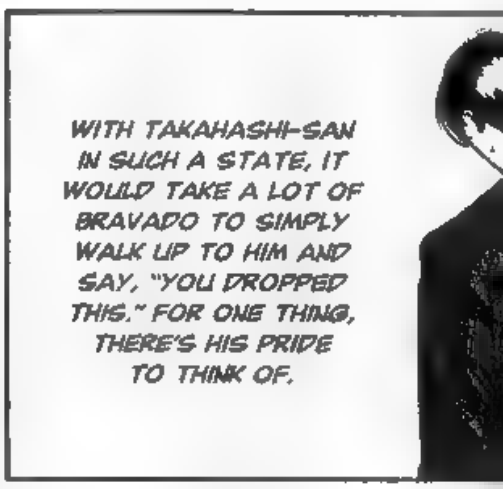
I SEE. AND WHAT SHOULD WE DO WITH THEM? DROP THEM OFF AT A POLICE STATION?

WELL, I WANT NOTHING MORE TO DO WITH THE GUY.
ACTUALLY, I WOULDN'T MIND SEEING IN WHAT WAY HE'S HAVING A "TOUGH TIME" OF IT.
I THINK TAKAHASHI-SAN IS HAVING A PRETTY TOUGH TIME WITHOUT 'EM RIGHT NOW... NOT THAT I HAVE A FRIGGIN' CLUE WHAT THEY'RE FOR.
HEY, EVERY TIME I GET INVOLVED IN SOMETHING LIKE THIS, I END UP GETTING BURNED. YOU CAN COUNT ME OUT.
MAEDA-KUN! THIS IS MOST UNFAIR!
I'LL LEAVE THIS TO YOU, KAMIYAMA. LATER.
HMM. I'M FEELING A CERTAIN RELUCTANCE. WHY MUST THIS BE SO AWKWARD?
2-1
THE NEXT DAY
I WONDER IF HE HAS A SPARE...
RATTLE
NO! I SHOULD APPROACH THIS WITH A MORE POSITIVE OUTLOOK! AFTER ALL, THIS IS MY CHANCE TO SEE TAKAHASHI-SAN WITHOUT THIS APPARATUS... THE QUESTION OF WHETHER OR NOT I ACTUALLY WISH TO SEE SUCH A THING BEING AN ENTIRELY DIFFERENT MATTER, OF COURSE.

IT WOULD APPEAR NOT.
UNNGH...
Towel

JUST A MOMENT. WHAT SORT OF "PRIDE" COULD THAT POSSIBLY BE?!

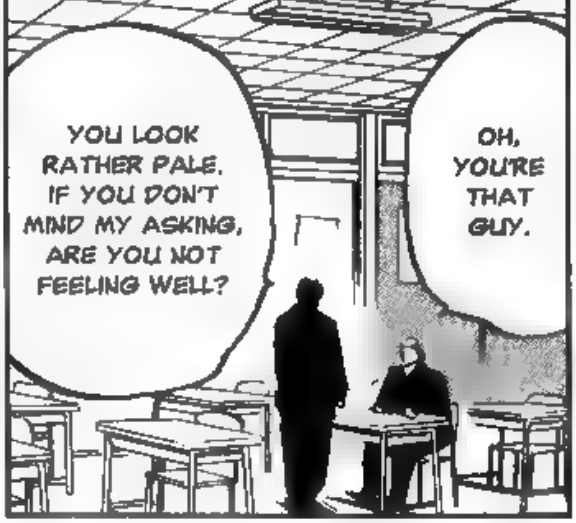
. . . .

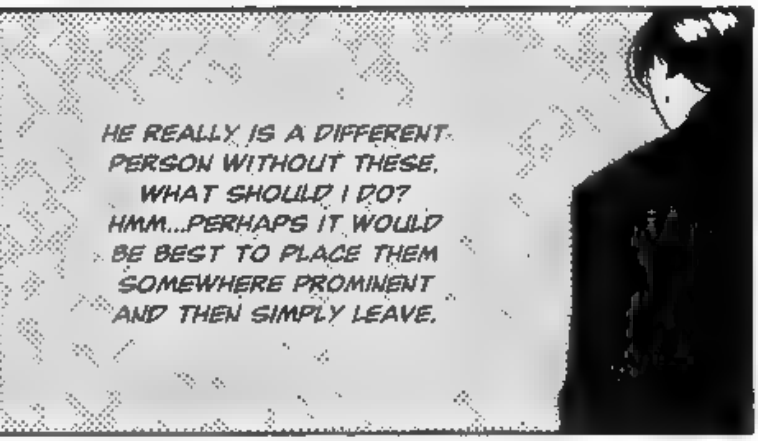

WITH TAKAHASHI-SAN IN SUCH A STATE, IT WOULD TAKE A LOT OF BRAVADO TO SIMPLY WALK UP TO HIM AND SAY, "YOU DROPPED THIS." FOR ONE THING, THERE'S HIS PRIDE TO THINK OF.

HUH?
TAKA-HASHI-SAN! AGAIN, MY THANKS FOR THE OTHER DAY.

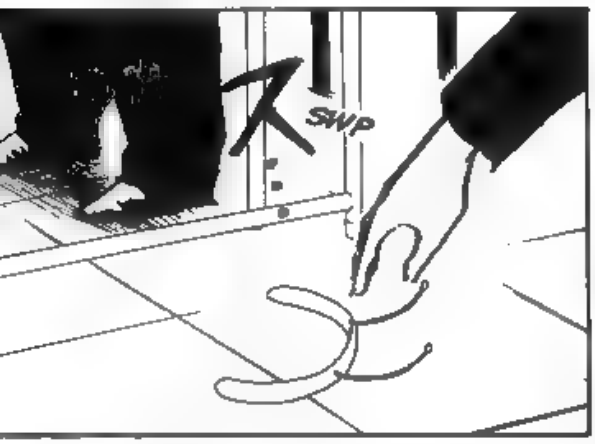
UNGH...

NONE OF YER DAMN BUSINESS!

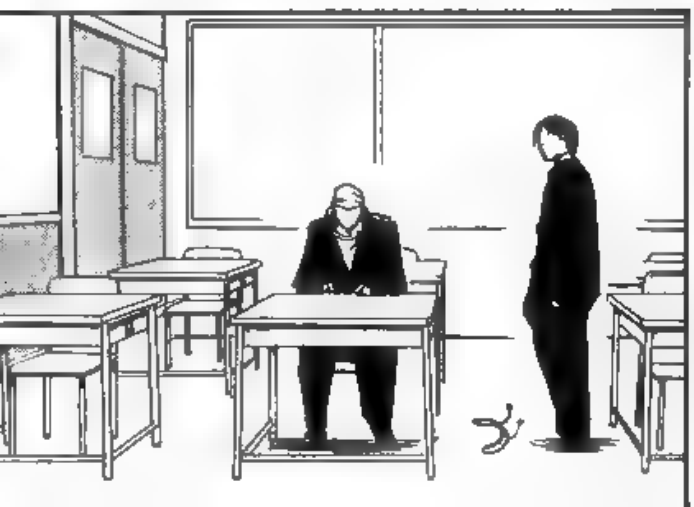

YOU LOOK RATHER PALE. IF YOU DON'T MIND MY ASKING, ARE YOU NOT FEELING WELL?
OH, YOU'RE THAT GUY.

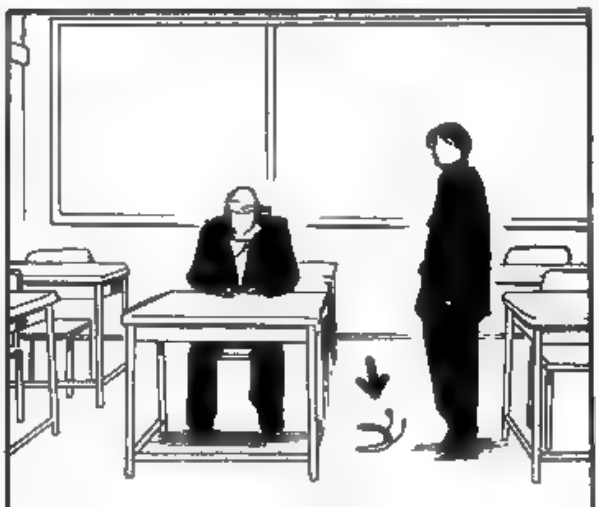

HE REALLY IS A DIFFERENT PERSON WITHOUT THESE. WHAT SHOULD I DO? HMM...PERHAPS IT WOULD BE BEST TO PLACE THEM SOMEWHERE PROMINENT AND THEN SIMPLY LEAVE.

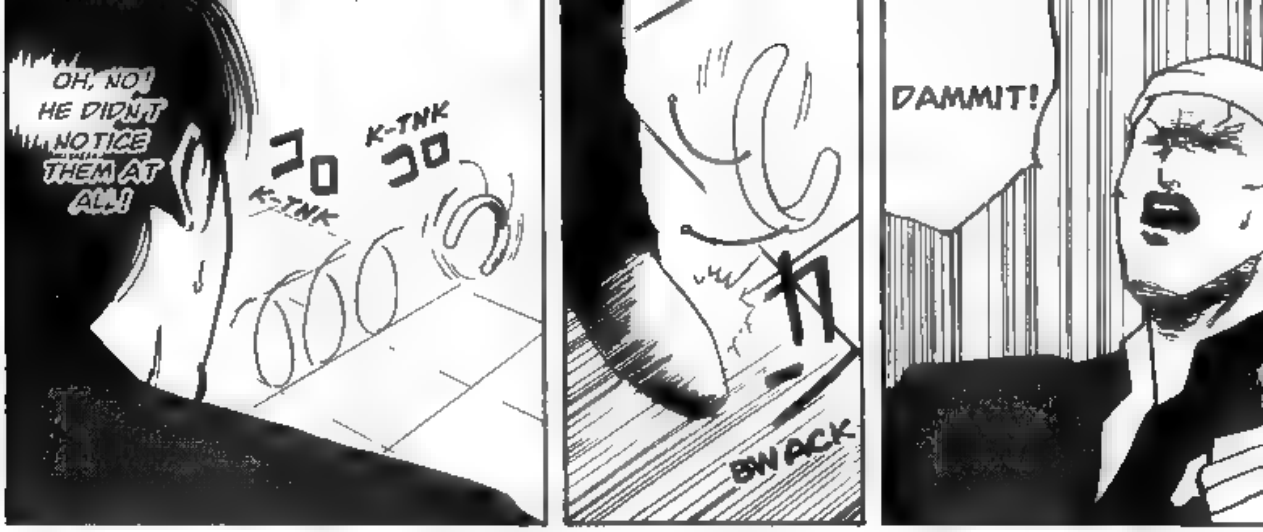
AH, HE IS IN AN EXTRAORDINARILY BAD MOOD! WITH HIM IN SUCH A STATE, I COULD NEVER HAND THESE TO HIM DIRECTLY.

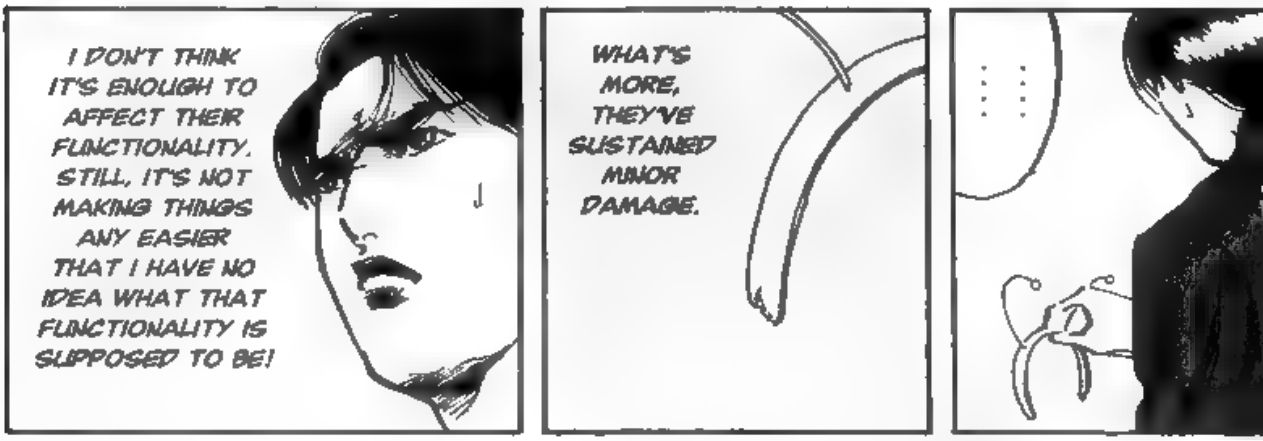

SWP

LNGH...
LEAVING THEM ON HIS DESK WOULD BE A LITTLE TOO OBVIOUS. A-HA! I WILL PLACE THEM STEALTHILY AT HIS FEET!

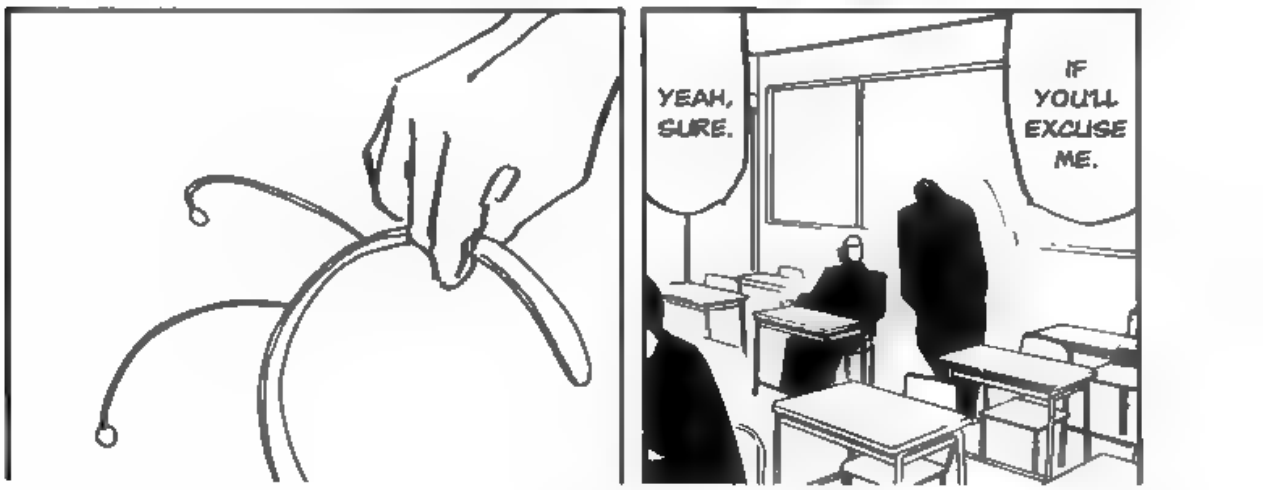




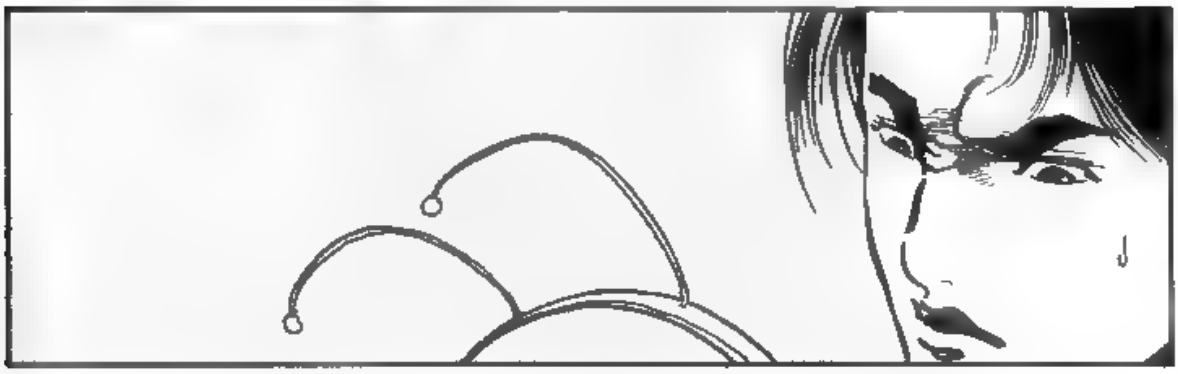

OH, NO! HE DIDN'T NOTICE THEM AT ALL!
K-TNK
K-TNK
DAMMIT!
BWACK


I DON'T THINK IT'S ENOUGH TO AFFECT THEIR FUNCTIONALITY. STILL, IT'S NOT MAKING THINGS ANY EASIER THAT I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT THAT FUNCTIONALITY IS SUPPOSED TO BE!
WHAT'S MORE, THEY'VE SUSTAINED MINOR DAMAGE.
. . . .

THERE'S NOTHING FOR IT--I'M JUST GOING TO HAVE TO DROP THEM IN PLAIN SIGHT. IT'S A BOLD MOVE, BUT I'M OUT OF OPTIONS!
THIS ISN'T GOOD! I HAVE TO DO SOMETHING QUICK!
AH. VERY WELL.
LOOK, IF YOU DON'T HAVE ANYTHING TO SAY THEN BEAT IT!


YEAH, SURE.
IF YOU'LL EXCUSE ME.

TNK
HUH?!
HE'S FINALLY NOTICED. NOW, IF HE'LL JUST PUT THAT STRANGE APPARATUS BACK ON HIS HEAD, MY WORK HERE WILL BE DONE.
TH- THESE ARE...
YES?
HEY!

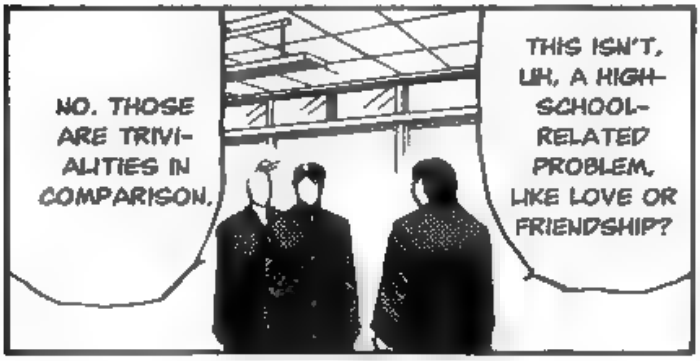


WHAT THE HELL *ARE* THOSE THINGS?

CHAPTER 129: **BOYS KEEP SWINGING**

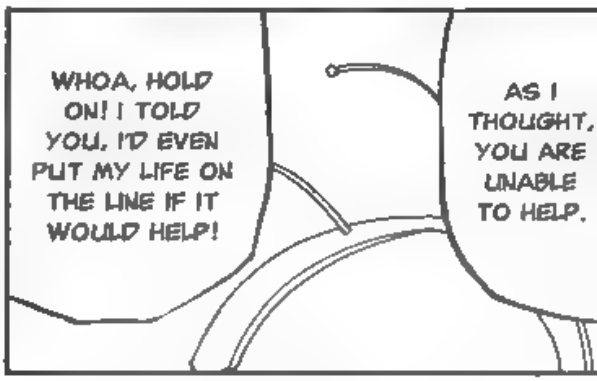
HEY, WHAT'S WITH THE LONG FACES?
M-HMM.
HMM.
MAN, YOU GUYS ARE **COLD**! WHY DO YOU ALWAYS HAVE TO KEEP ME AT A DISTANCE? AND YOU DON'T EVEN REMEMBER MY NAME!
THERE'S NO POINT IN TALKING ABOUT IT.
NU-THIN'.
WHAT IS IT?
SOMETHING HAS BEEN BOTHERING US LATELY, AND WE SEEM UNABLE TO RESOLVE IT. THAT BEING SAID, I DON'T THINK BRINGING IN SOMEONE ELSE WILL HELP THINGS ANY.
THEN TELL ME WHAT'S GOING ON!
IT'S NOT AS IF WE HATE YOU OR ANYTHING...
THERE YOU GO! JUST TELL ME WHAT'S GOIN' ON AND IT'S AS GOOD AS SOLVED!
VERY WELL. IF THAT'S HOW YOU FEEL, I WILL ASK FOR YOUR ADVICE.
HEY, DON'T SELL ME SHORT! I MAY BE A THUG, BUT I ALSO KNOW THE VALUE OF FRIENDSHIP. HECK, I'D PUT MY LIFE ON THE LINE FOR MY BUDS! IF SOMETHING'S GIVING YOU GRIEF, JUST SAY IT, MAN!

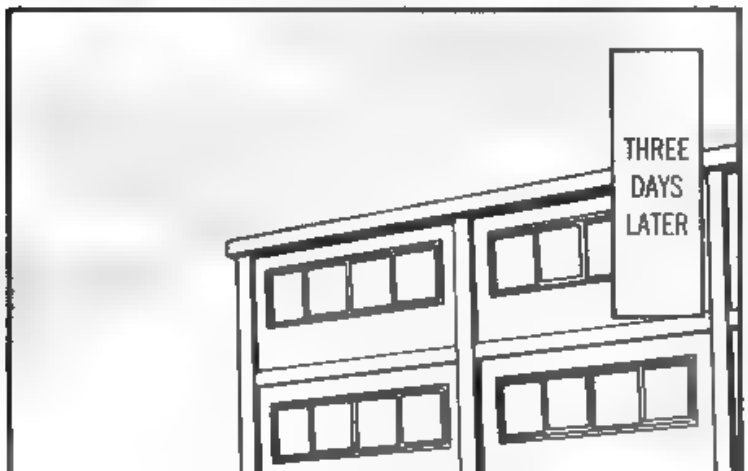
HUH?
WE DON'T KNOW HOW THESE WORK.


NO. THOSE ARE TRIVIALITIES IN COMPARISON.
THIS ISN'T, UH, A HIGH-SCHOOL-RELATED PROBLEM, LIKE LOVE OR FRIENDSHIP?

INDEED. SO I'LL LEAVE IT TO YOU.
HOW THEY WORK?

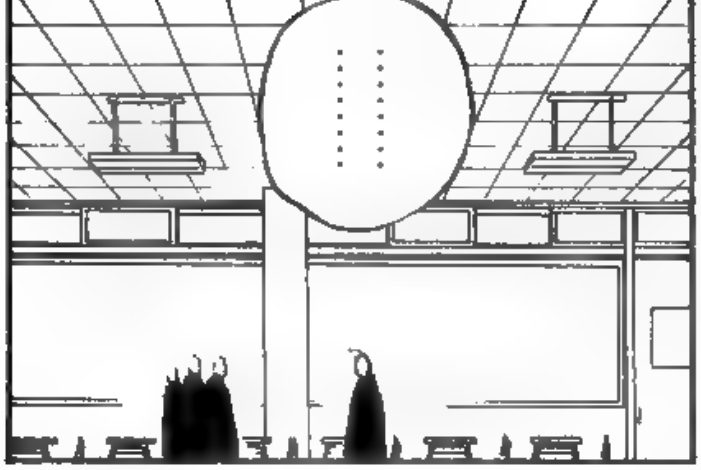
LOOK, JUST GIVE ME SOME MORE TIME!
ONE SHOULD KNOW WHEN TO CALL IT QUITS.
WORDS SPOKEN IN A MOMENT OF BRAVADO, NO DOUBT.

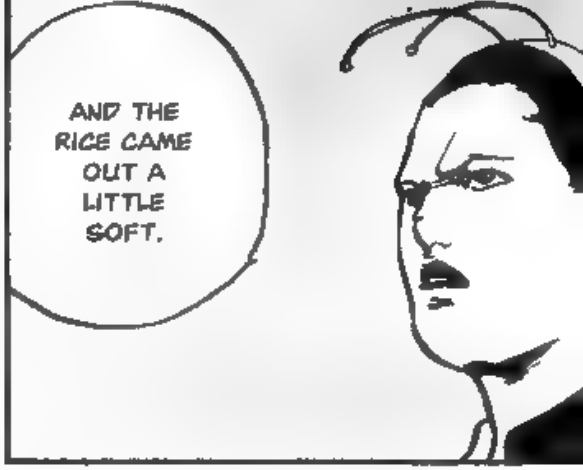

WHOA, HOLD ON! I TOLD YOU, I'D EVEN PUT MY LIFE ON THE LINE IF IT WOULD HELP!
AS I THOUGHT, YOU ARE UNABLE TO HELP.

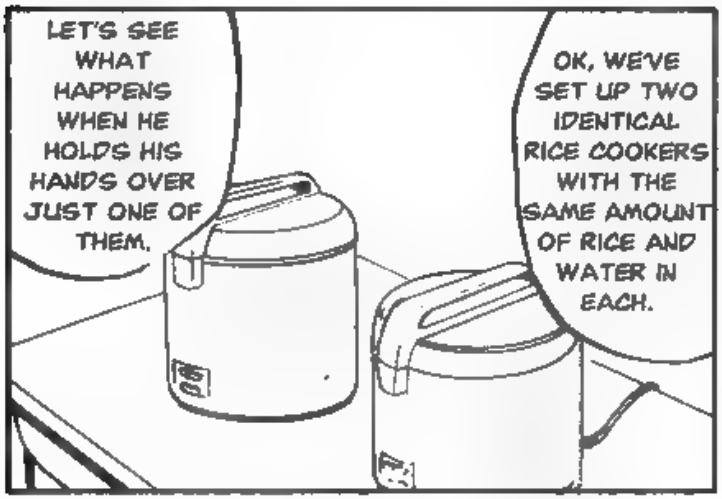

THREE DAYS LATER

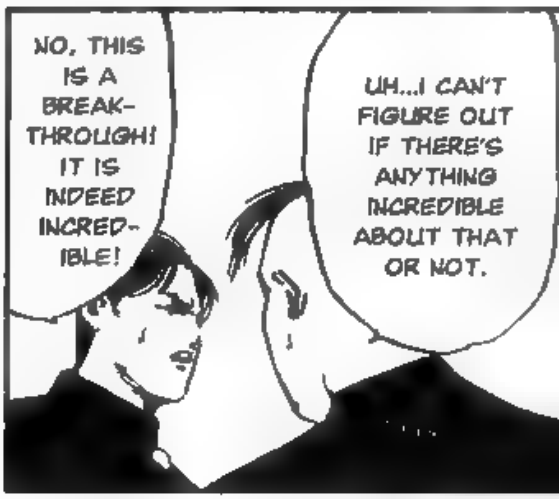
I'M TAKING THESE FOR A COUPLE DAYS.
THERE'S NO NEED TO PUSH YOURSELF.

WHAT? REALLY?!
I KNOW WHAT THEY'RE FOR.
WELL?
THEN I PUT THESE ON MY HEAD...
HUH?
FIRST, I PUT SOME RICE AND WATER INTO A RICE COOKER...
OH! YOU MADE THE RICE COOK WITHOUT PLUGGING IT IN, RIGHT?!
AND HELD MY HANDS OVER THE RICE COOKER.
WELL, I HELD MY HAND OVER THE COOKER...
SO WHAT HAPPENED?
AH, SORRY. I GOT A LITTLE CARRIED AWAY THERE.
OF COURSE NOT. I HAD TO TURN THE COOKER ON.

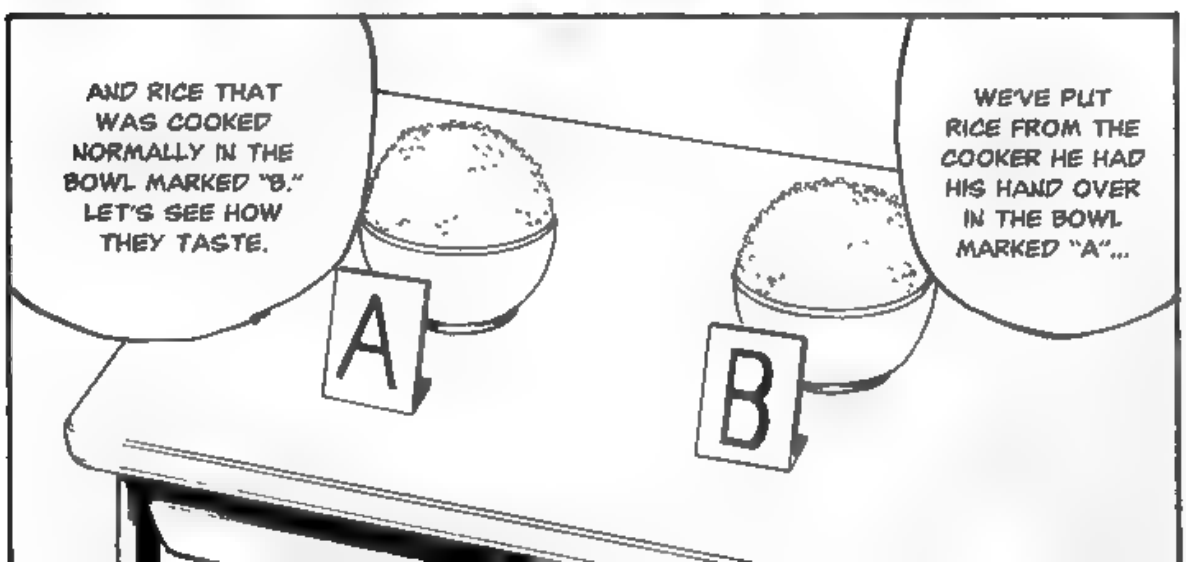





LET'S SEE WHAT HAPPENS WHEN HE HOLDS HIS HANDS OVER JUST ONE OF THEM.
OK, WE'VE SET UP TWO IDENTICAL RICE COOKERS WITH THE SAME AMOUNT OF RICE AND WATER IN EACH.



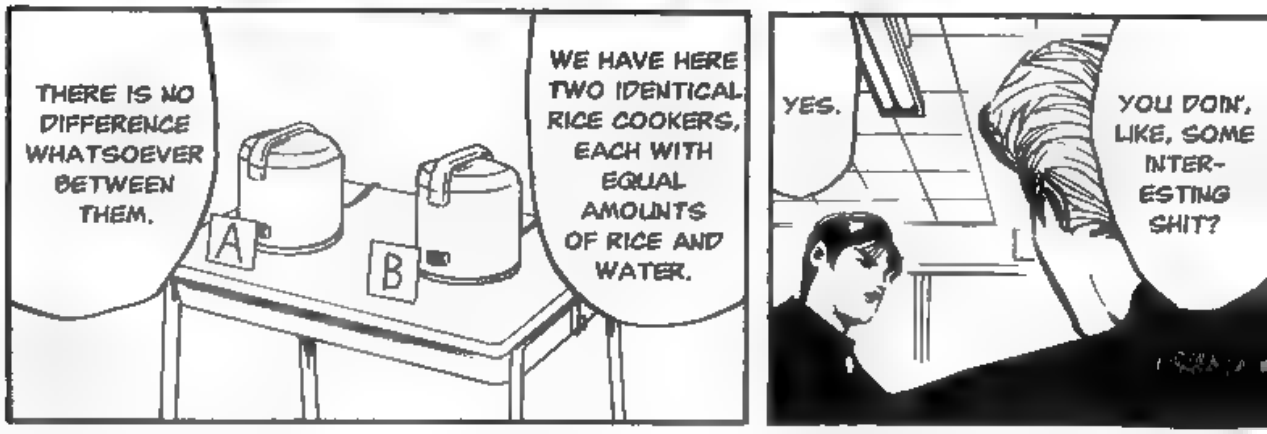
30 MINUTES LATER


AND RICE THAT WAS COOKED NORMALLY IN THE BOWL MARKED "B." LET'S SEE HOW THEY TASTE.
WE'VE PUT RICE FROM THE COOKER HE HAD HIS HAND OVER IN THE BOWL MARKED "A"...
A
B

I'LL START WITH BOWL A.
AND NEXT, BOWL B.
REAL-LY?!
"A" IS SOFT-ER.
WELL?
GO ON, TRY SOME.
IT'S A REALLY SUBTLE DIFFERENCE, BARELY NOTICEABLE AT ALL, BUT IT'S DEFINITELY SOFTER.

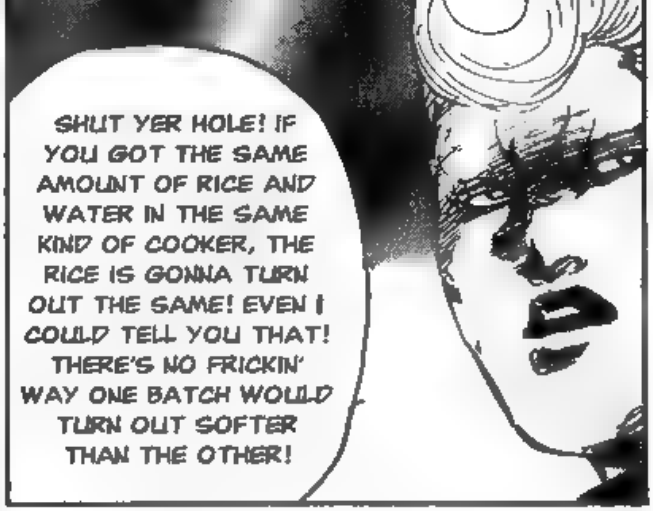
HELL, I'M IMPRESSED HE EVEN **THOUGHT** OF IT!
I'M IMPRESSED THAT OUR FRIEND HERE NOTICED.
HMM. ONE PROBABLY WOULDN'T NOTICE WITHOUT BEING TOLD, BUT "A" IS DEFINITELY THE MORE TENDER.

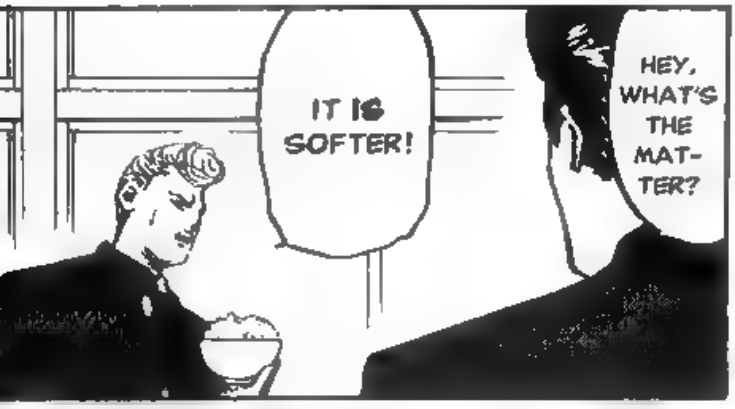
WHAT'S ALL THE FRICKIN' RACKET?!
HEY!
AW, YOU'RE GOIN' TOO FAR.
I WAS WRONG ABOUT YOU, MAN.
I USED TO THINK YOU WERE JUST SOME ORDINARY GUY.
I don't know your name, though.


THERE IS NO DIFFERENCE WHATSOEVER BETWEEN THEM.
A
B
WE HAVE HERE TWO IDENTICAL RICE COOKERS, EACH WITH EQUAL AMOUNTS OF RICE AND WATER.
YES.
YOU DON', LIKE, SOME INTER-ESTING SHIT?

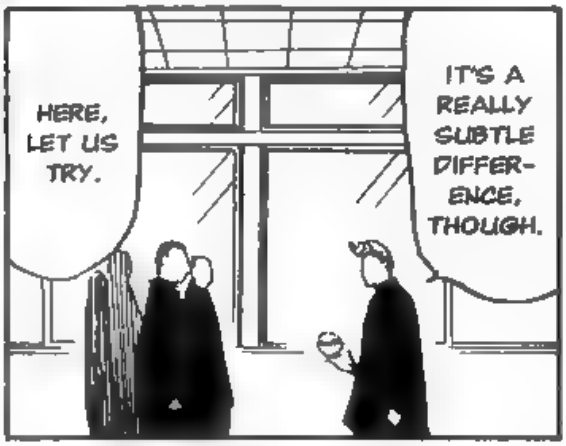
AH. BUT WHEN OUR NAMELESS FRIEND PUT THAT HORN-LIKE DEVICE ON HIS HEAD AND HELD HIS HAND OVER ONE COOKER, THE RICE IN THAT COOKER CAME OUT SLIGHTLY SOFTER.
HUH?! THEY TURNED OUT THE SAME, YOU BASTARD! I'M GONNA FRIGGIN KILL YA!
WE HAVE COOKED BOTH BATCHES OF RICE. HOW DO YOU THINK THEY TURNED OUT?

HMPH! DUMB-EST DAMN THING I EVER...
WOULD YOU CARE TO TASTE FOR YOURSELF?


SHUT YER HOLE! IF YOU GOT THE SAME AMOUNT OF RICE AND WATER IN THE SAME KIND OF COOKER, THE RICE IS GONNA TURN OUT THE SAME! EVEN I COULD TELL YOU THAT! THERE'S NO FRICKIN' WAY ONE BATCH WOULD TURN OUT SOFTER THAN THE OTHER!

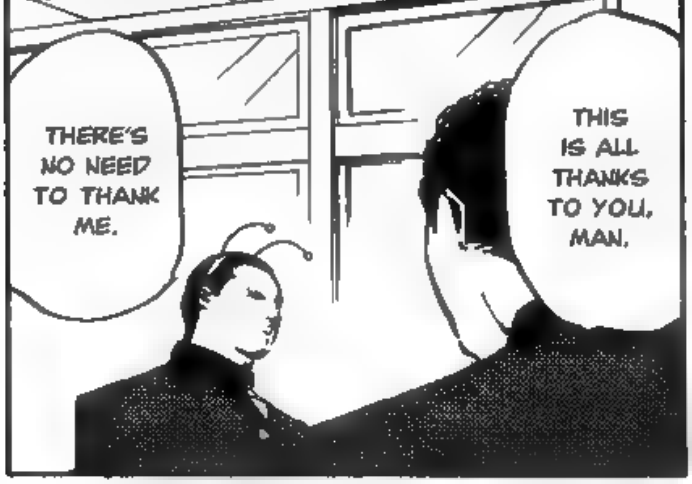

IT IS SOFTER!
HEY, WHAT'S THE MAT-TER?

!

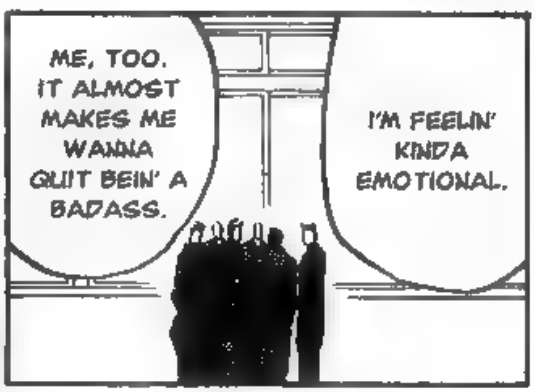

HERE, LET US TRY.
IT'S A REALLY SUBTLE DIFFER-ENCE, THOUGH.

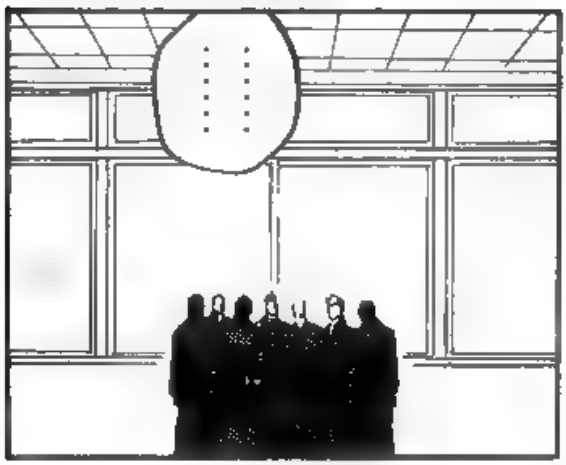
UP TILL NOW I'VE LIVED MY LIFE AS A BADASS, DOIN' AS I'VE PLEASED AND HATIN' ON EVERYTHING AND EVERYONE ELSE. IT'S LIKE, I'D EVEN FORGOTTEN HOW TO TRUST OTHER PEOPLE!

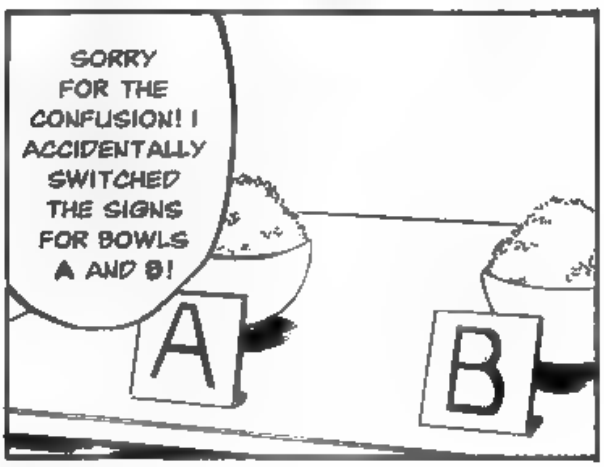
I'LL BE DAMNED.
THIS RICE IS TENDER!



THAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT THING, AND IT'S WHAT GIVES ME THE MOST HAPPINESS.
EVEN IN THIS HARSH AND INHOSPITABLE SCHOOL, THE HEARTS OF A FEW BADASSES HAVE BEEN TOUCHED.







SO WHAT *ARE* THOSE THINGS USED FOR?!

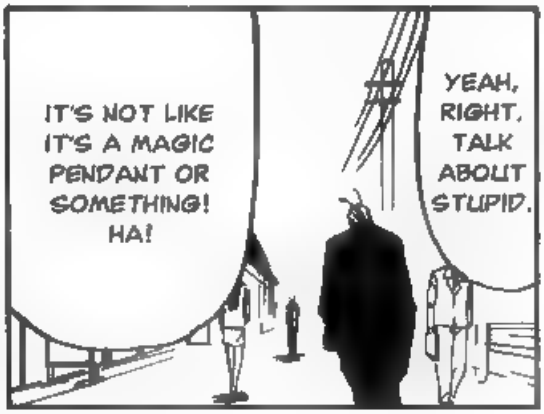
CHAPTER 130: **A DAY IN THE LIFE**

NO MATTER HOW MUCH TIME WE INVEST, WE'RE NO CLOSER TO DETERMINING WHAT FUNCTION THESE SERVE.
THUS...
NOTHING? YOU DON'T FEEL, LIKE, SMARTER OR MORE HYPER OR ANYTHING?
NOT REALLY.
WELL? DO YOU NOTICE ANY CHANGE WHEN YOU PUT THEM ON?
I BELIEVE THAT...
LET'S HEAR IT.
AS I STATED EARLIER, THE PROBLEM WE FACE IS **HOW** EXACTLY TO OPERATE THIS DEVICE. HOWEVER, I HAVE FORMULATED A HYPOTHESIS.
. . . . . .
WE ARE USING IT INCORRECTLY.

OPEN YOUR EYES, MAN!
THAT'S THE WHOLE REASON WE'VE BEEN PUTTING IT ON **OUR** HEADS!
WHAT?! BUT TAKAHASHI-SAN ALWAYS JUST WORE IT ON HIS HEAD!
PUT SIMPLY...
HUH? LIKE WHAT?!
THERE IS A CRITICAL DIFFERENCE IN THE WAY TAKAHASHI-SAN USED THESE AS OPPOSED TO OUR OWN METHODOLOGY!
.....
TAKAHASHI-SAN WORE THESE NONSTOP, 24 HOURS A DAY.
BUT IT'D BE PAIN TO WEAR THESE THINGS FOR 24 HOURS STRAIGHT! WHO'D WANNA VOLUNTEER FOR THAT?!
I CAN'T SAY FOR SURE, BUT RIGHT NOW IT'S OUR ONLY OPTION.
SO YOU'RE SAYING THAT IF WE WEAR THESE FOR 24 HOURS, WE'LL FIND OUT THEIR TRUE POWERS?

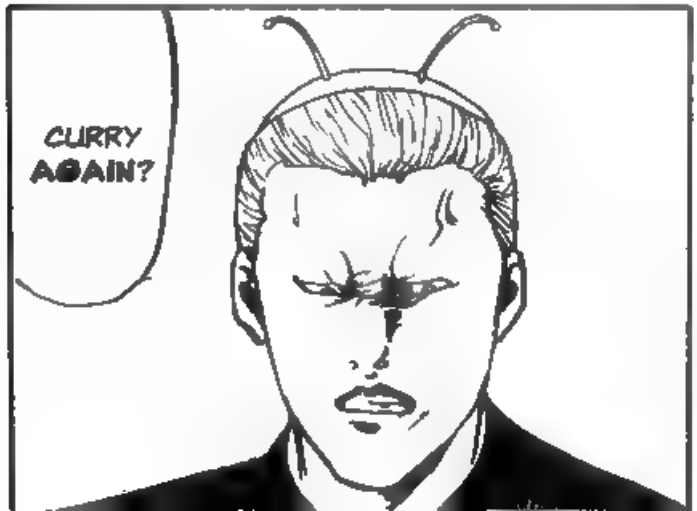
LEAVE IT TO... HANG ON A SECOND.
YEAH, SURE.
MAEDA-KUN, IF YOU PLEASE.
VERY WELL. WHY DON'T WE DECIDE VIA ROCK-PAPER-SCISSORS?
YOU'RE DAMN RIGHT I NOTICED! NOW START BEIN' FAIR!
YOU NO-TICED, DID YOU?
WHY SHOULD I? I'VE BEEN MEANING TO ASK THIS FOR A WHILE: WHY DO YOU GUYS ALWAYS PICK ME TO DO THIS KIND OF STUFF?!
DAMMIT!
Lost
MAEDA-KUN, IF YOU PLEASE.
THANKS A LOT, GUYS!
WHAT A PAIN.

IT MIGHT JUST BE MY IMAGINATION, BUT EVER SINCE I PUT THESE ON, I FEEL LIKE SOMETHING HAS CHANGED INSIDE ME, OR MY LUCK HAS IMPROVED OR SOMETHING
STILL, NOTHING HAS GONE RIGHT FOR ME LATELY...


IT'S NOT LIKE IT'S A MAGIC PENDANT OR SOMETHING! HA!
YEAH, RIGHT. TALK ABOUT STUPID.

SPLSSH
TOK TOK TOK

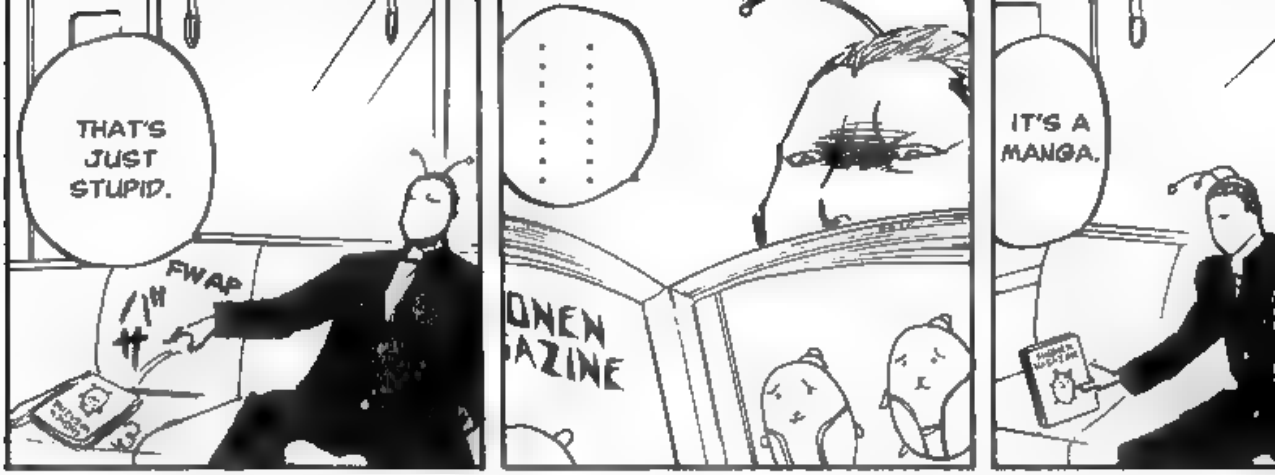
I'M HOME.
K-CHK


CURRY AGAIN?

AND LET ME ASK YOU, DON'T YOU THINK IT'S KINDA WEIRD TO ALWAYS PUT MY SPOON IN A GLASS OF WATER?
SPLOSH
TOK
DIDN'T WE JUST HAVE CURRY THE OTHER NIGHT?
THEY DON'T EVEN USE SPOONS IN INDIA, DO THEY?
SURE, SOME CURRY RESTAURANTS DO THAT, BUT THERE'S NO REAL REASON FOR IT, RIGHT? I MEAN, WHAT WAS THE FIRST PERSON WHO PLUNKED HIS SPOON INTO A GLASS OF WATER THINKING ANYWAY?
SAY SOME-THING, WOULD YOU?!
IT'S LIKE I'M TALKIN' TO MYSELF.
JEEZ!
Bath Room

DAMN, THAT'S HOT!
SPLSH
YEOW!
SPLSH
AHH...
IT SHOULD BE OK NOW.
IT'S STILL HOT!
SPLASH
TURNING OUT THE LIGHTS IS SUCH A PAIN. I'VE GOTTA GET UP AND TURN THEM OFF EVERY SINGLE TIME.
=YAWN=
TIME FOR BED.

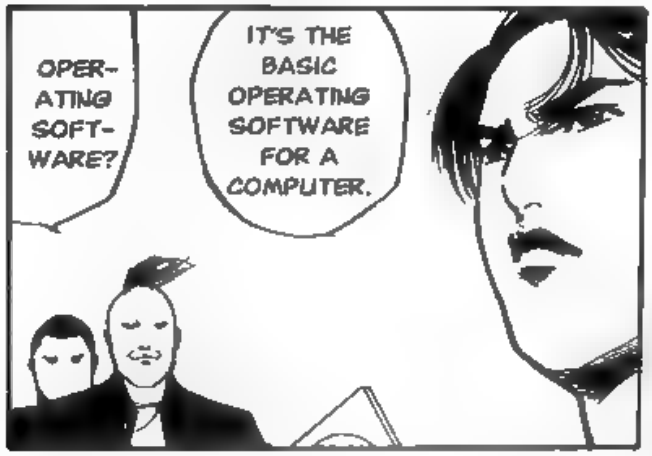
CHIRP CHIRP
MORN ING
I'LL JUST SLEEP WITH 'EM ON.
OH, WELL.
HUH? YOU DIDN'T PUT MY SPOON IN WATER THIS TIME.
CURRY AGAIN?
VWSSH
WELL, AN- SWER ME!
SO YOU REALLY ARE LISTENING, EVEN IF IT LOOKS LIKE YOU AREN'T. I'M TOUCHED... ANYWAY, IF THERE'S NO POINT IN DOING SOMETHING, IT'S BEST TO NOT DO IT AT ALL, RIGHT?
SHONEN MAGAZINE
HM?
TODAY'S SCHOOL LUNCH IS RAMEN, ISN'T IT?
I DON'T CARE IF CURRY DOES TASTE BETTER THE NEXT DAY, I NEVER WANT TO SEE A BOWL OF THE STUFF AGAIN!

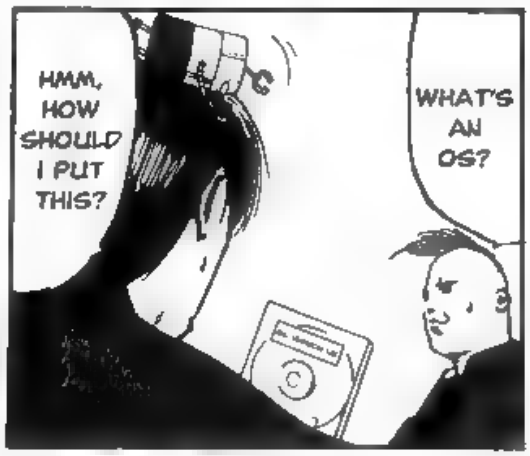


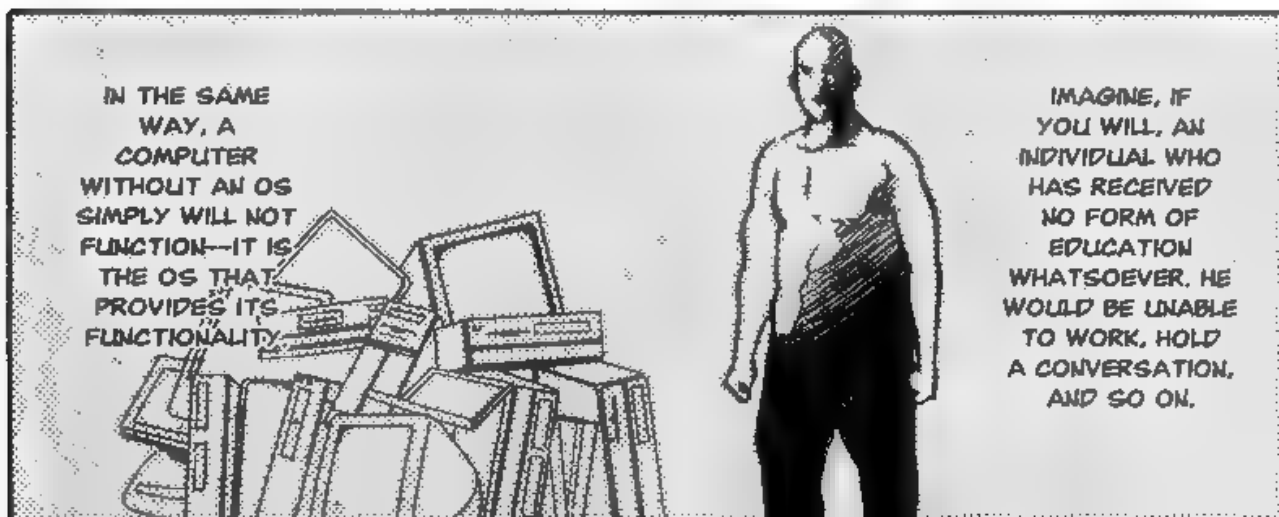
YEAH, THAT'S PROBABLY UNRELATED.

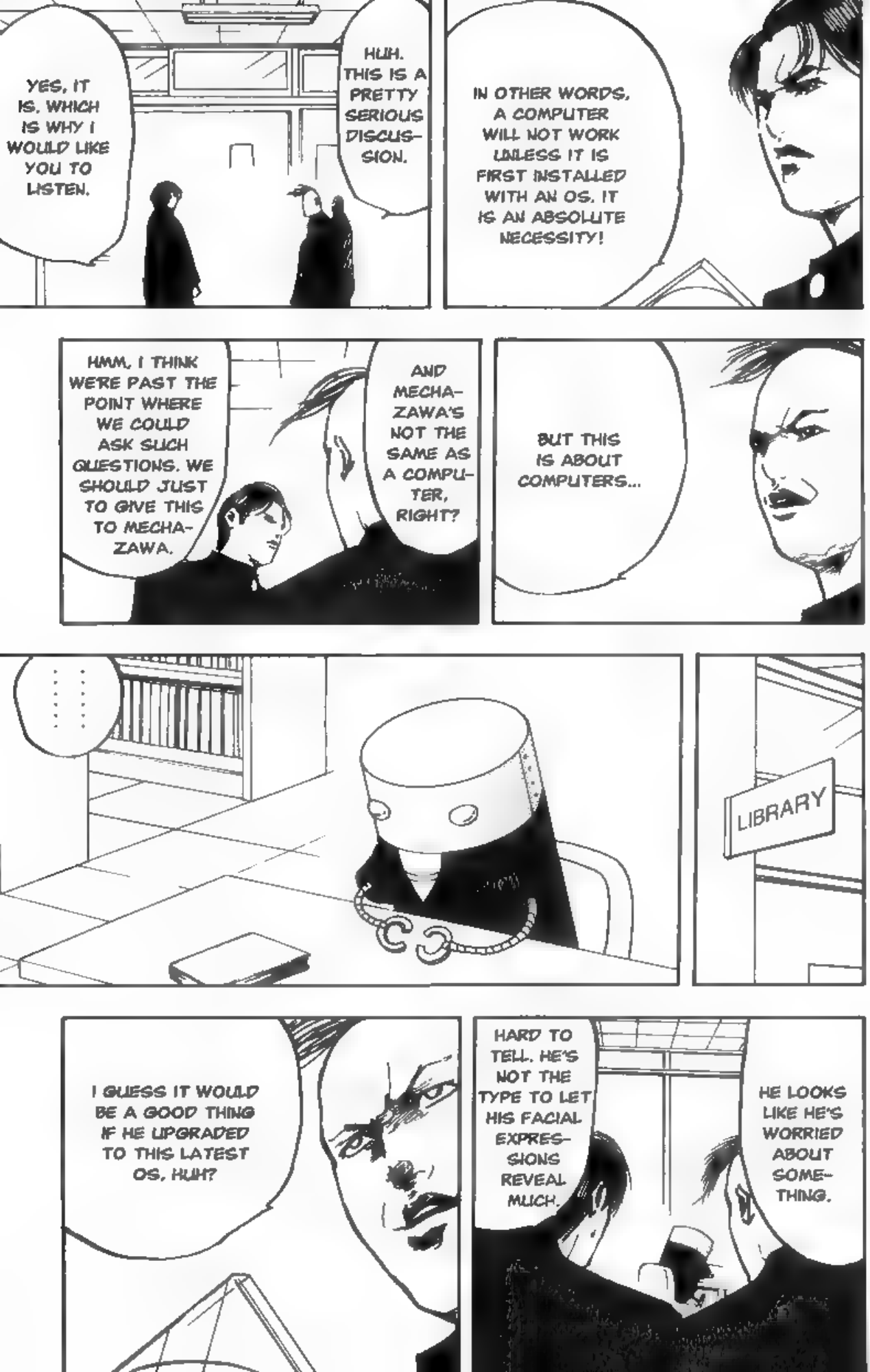
CHAPTER 131: **START ME UP**

OS?
MECHA-ZAWA OS VERSION 5.02
OS VERSION 5.02
FOR MECHAZAWA

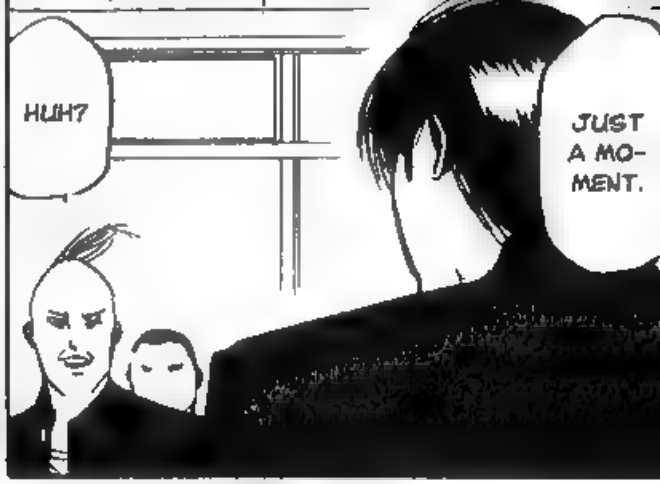

OPER-ATING SOFT-WARE?
IT'S THE BASIC OPERATING SOFTWARE FOR A COMPUTER.

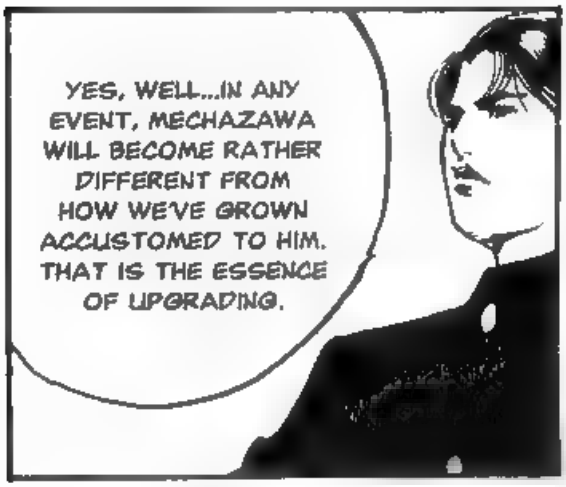

HMM, HOW SHOULD I PUT THIS?
WHAT'S AN OS?


IN THE SAME WAY, A COMPUTER WITHOUT AN OS SIMPLY WILL NOT FUNCTION--IT IS THE OS THAT PROVIDES ITS FUNCTIONALITY.
IMAGINE, IF YOU WILL, AN INDIVIDUAL WHO HAS RECEIVED NO FORM OF EDUCATION WHATSOEVER. HE WOULD BE UNABLE TO WORK, HOLD A CONVERSATION, AND SO ON.

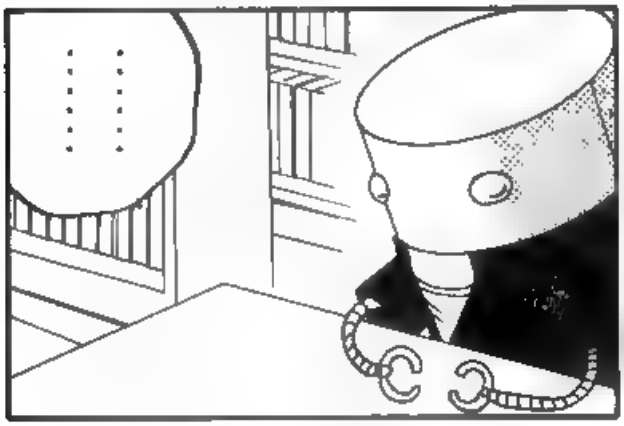

YES, IT IS. WHICH IS WHY I WOULD LIKE YOU TO LISTEN.
HUH. THIS IS A PRETTY SERIOUS DISCUSSION.
IN OTHER WORDS, A COMPUTER WILL NOT WORK UNLESS IT IS FIRST INSTALLED WITH AN OS. IT IS AN ABSOLUTE NECESSITY!
HMM, I THINK WE'RE PAST THE POINT WHERE WE COULD ASK SUCH QUESTIONS. WE SHOULD JUST TO GIVE THIS TO MECHA-ZAWA.
AND MECHA-ZAWA'S NOT THE SAME AS A COMPU-TER, RIGHT?
BUT THIS IS ABOUT COMPUTERS...
. . . . . .
LIBRARY
I GUESS IT WOULD BE A GOOD THING IF HE UPGRADED TO THIS LATEST OS, HUH?
HARD TO TELL. HE'S NOT THE TYPE TO LET HIS FACIAL EXPRES-SIONS REVEAL MUCH.
HE LOOKS LIKE HE'S WORRIED ABOUT SOME-THING.

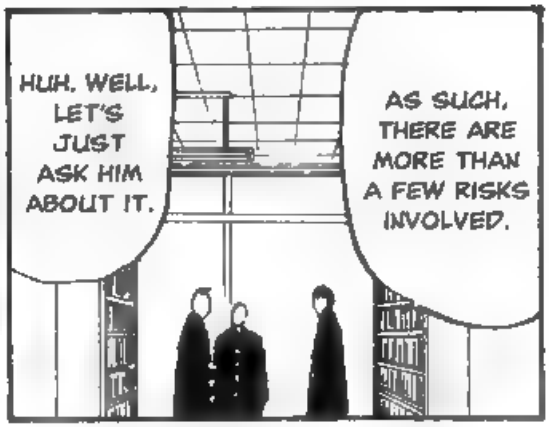
INSTALLING A NEW OPERATING SYSTEM INTO AN OLDER COMPUTER COULD CAUSE SERIOUS PROBLEMS...

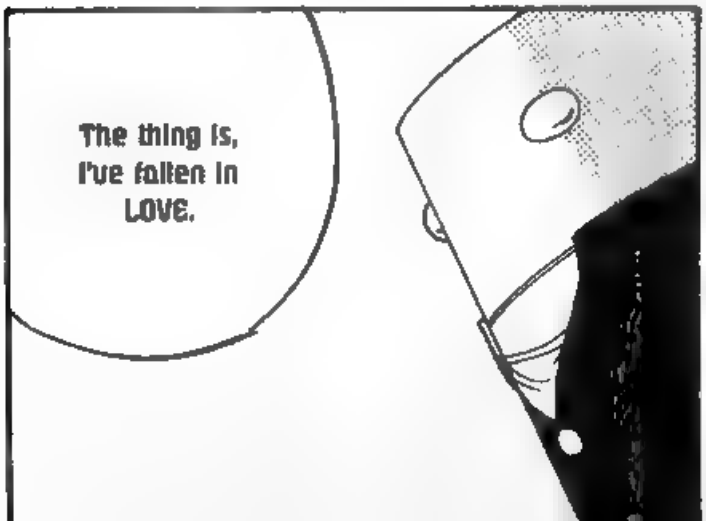

HUH?
JUST A MOMENT.

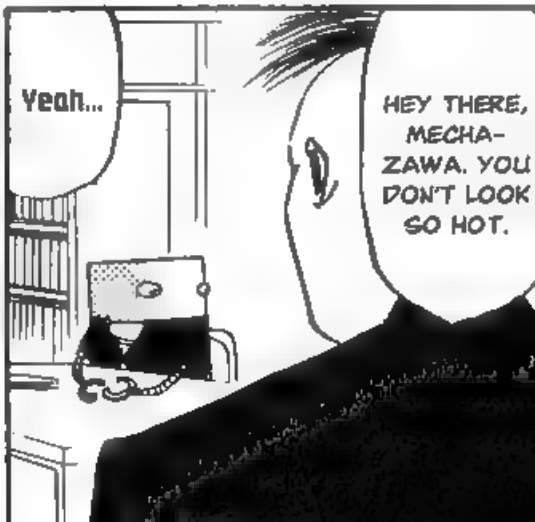

YES, WELL...IN ANY EVENT, MECHAZAWA WILL BECOME RATHER DIFFERENT FROM HOW WE'VE GROWN ACCUSTOMED TO HIM. THAT IS THE ESSENCE OF UPGRADING.

I'M TELLIN' YOU, THIS HAS GOT NOTHIN' TO DO WITH MECHAZWA!
AS WELL AS INCONVENIENCES SUCH AS YOUR CURRENT PRINTER BECOMING UNUSABLE.


. . . . . .


HUH. WELL, LET'S JUST ASK HIM ABOUT IT.
AS SUCH, THERE ARE MORE THAN A FEW RISKS INVOLVED.

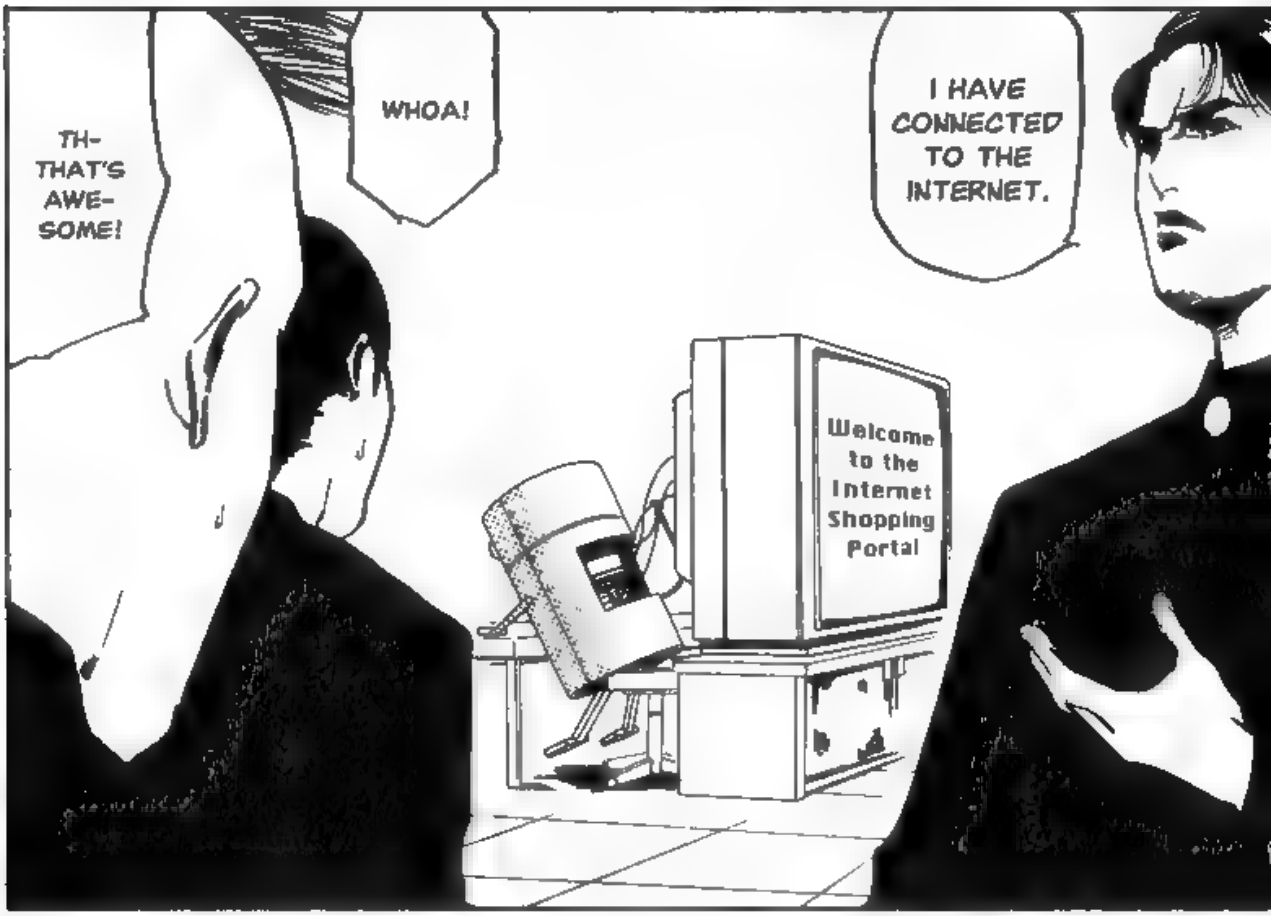

The thing is, I've fallen in LOVE.


Yeah...
HEY THERE, MECHAZAWA. YOU DON'T LOOK SO HOT.

But how could a badass like me, the lowest of the low, end up falling for someone?!
HE'S FALLEN IN LOVE!
If I could, I'd start from scratch and have another go at life. Sheesh! Listen to me talkin' this kind of crap!
I can't get this pain in my heart to stop.
It's like...
Huh?
MECHA-ZAWA-KUN, WE'RE HERE TO HELP.
I GUESS THAT MAKES THIS PRETTY EASY.
HE WANTS ANOTHER GO AT LIFE!
KA-CHAK
Uh, OK.
JUST STAND WITH YOUR BACK FACING ME. THIS WILL BE OVER BEFORE YOU KNOW IT.

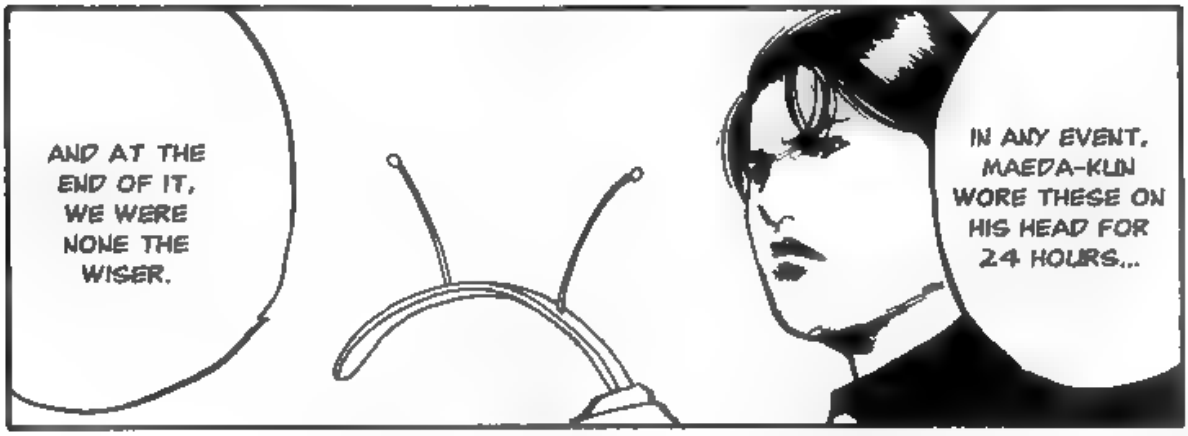
THE BIOS SCREEN. I'M GOING TO CHANGE THIS SETTING TO THE CD DRIVE.
WHAT IS THIS?
BIOS
Primary boot device:
A Drive
YES, I THINK I CAN FIGURE THIS OUT.
YOU OK?
HM?
NOT AT ALL. NEXT, WE'LL GO THROUGH A FEW MORE SCREENS ANSWERING SOME BASIC SETUP QUESTIONS.
LOOKS TRICKY.
YEAH. WE SHOULD HOLD OFF FOR NOW AND READ THROUGH THE MANUAL AGAIN.
HEY, ISN'T THAT BAD?
Or the Mechazawa's data could...
WARNING:
Proceeding with this operation will erase all of your previously stored data. Do you still wish to continue?
YES NO
. . . . . .
HE CLEARLY STATED THAT HE'D LIKE TO START OVER FROM SCRATCH, SO WE SHOULD JUST DELETE EVERYTHING.
That's cold...
HUH?!
CLICK
CONTI-NUE!

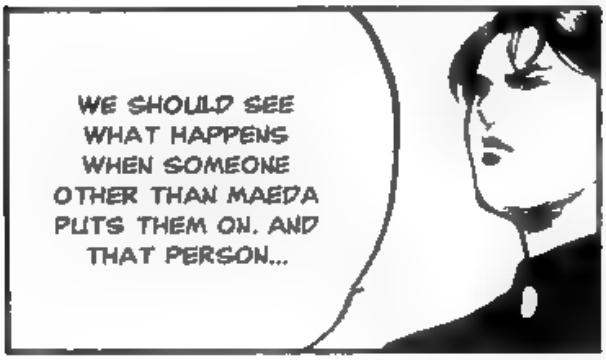
IT'S A SORT OF PASSWORD TO PREVENT UNAUTHORIZED USE OF THIS CD. BUT I DON'T KNOW WHAT IT IS.
WHAT'S A SERIAL NUMBER?
BLIP!
Please enter serial number.
AH! IT MUST BE!
THIS IS IT?
SAY, KAMI-YAMA? DO YOU THINK MAY-BE...
HMM. NORMALLY, THE MANUFAC-TURER WILL ATTACH A STICKER WITH THE SERIAL NUMBER ONTO THE HARD-WARE.
IT'S NOT ON THE CASE.
CLICK
AH, THAT'S ONLY IF WE WISH TO USE PERIPHERALS SUCH AS DIGITAL CAMERAS. ALL WE HAVE TO DO IS INPUT THE COUNTRY, REGION AND OWNER NAME, AS WELL AS THE DATE AND TIME ZONE.
NOW IT'S TELLIN' US TO "INSTALL DRIVERS."
BLIP
NICE!
OK
DID IT WORK?!
WHOA. HE'S RESPOND-ING!
BEE-BEEP

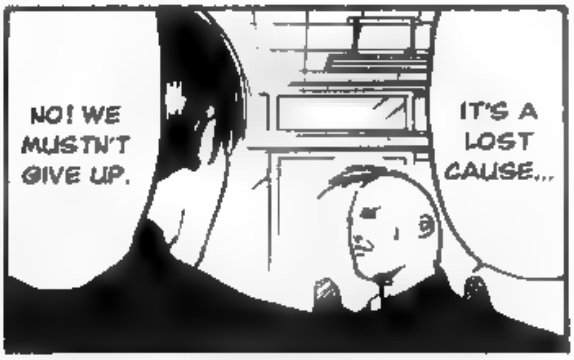


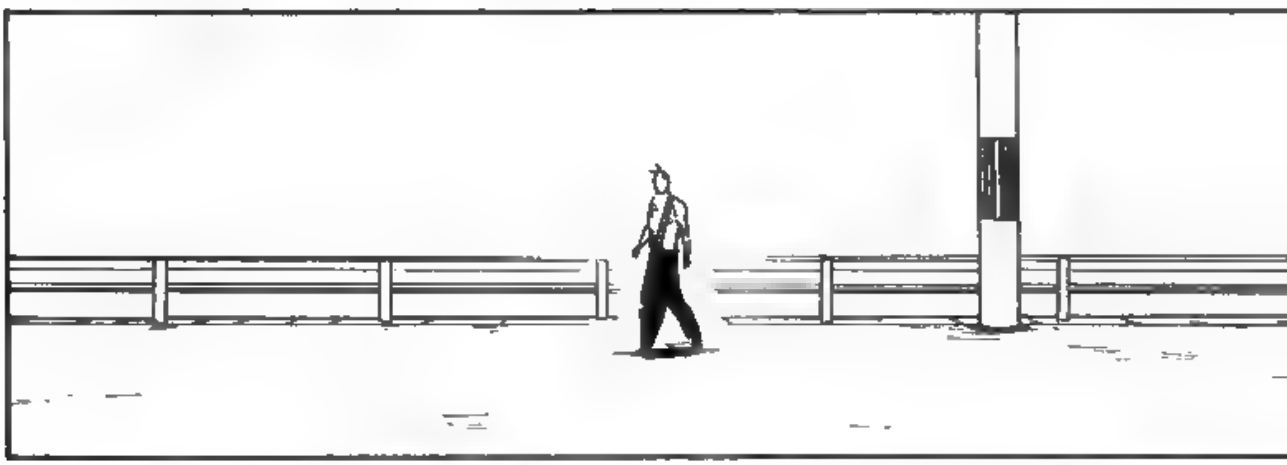
MECHAZAWA'S LOVE: TERMINATED.

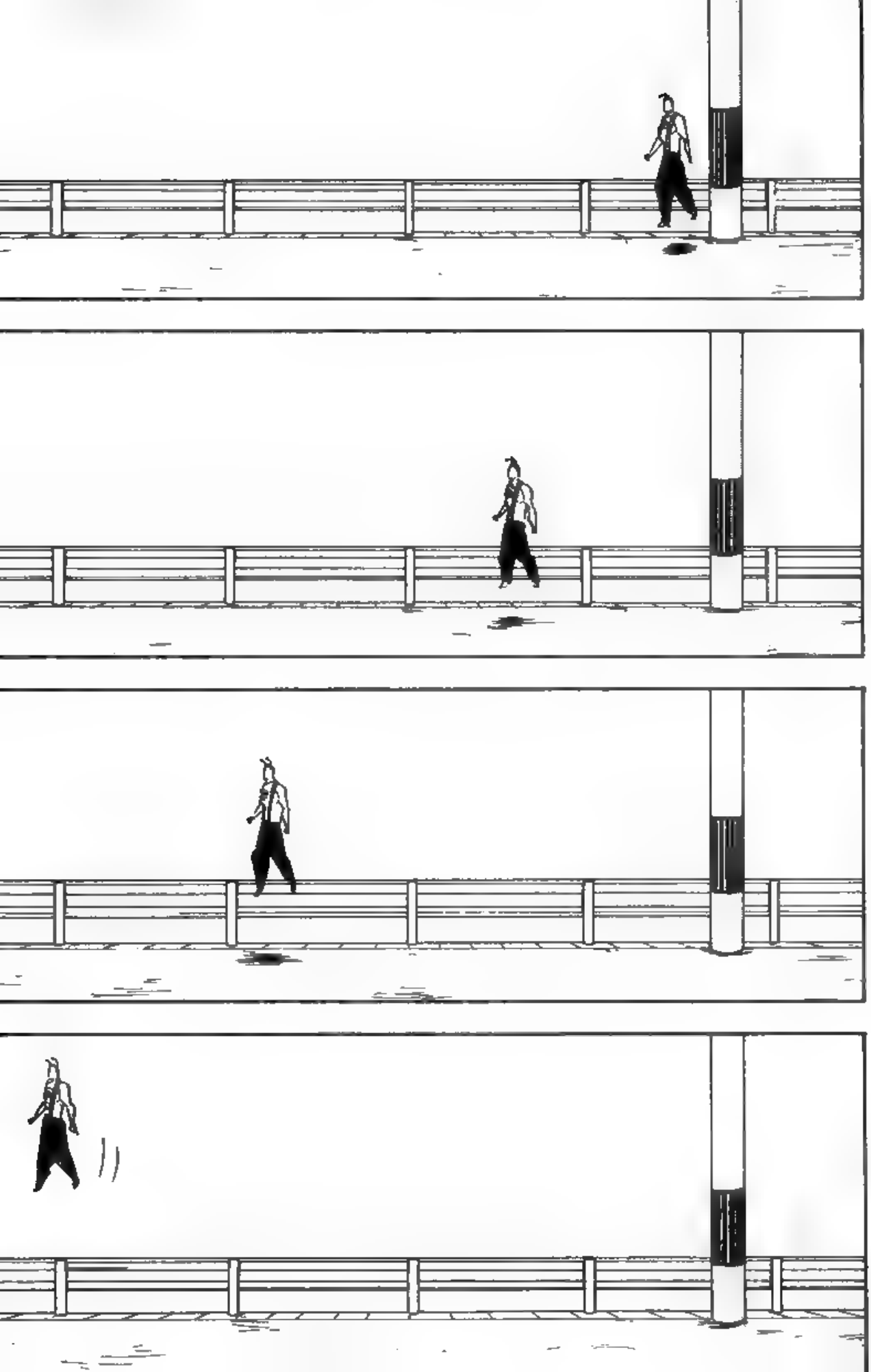
CHAPTER 132: **I WANT TO BREAK FREE**

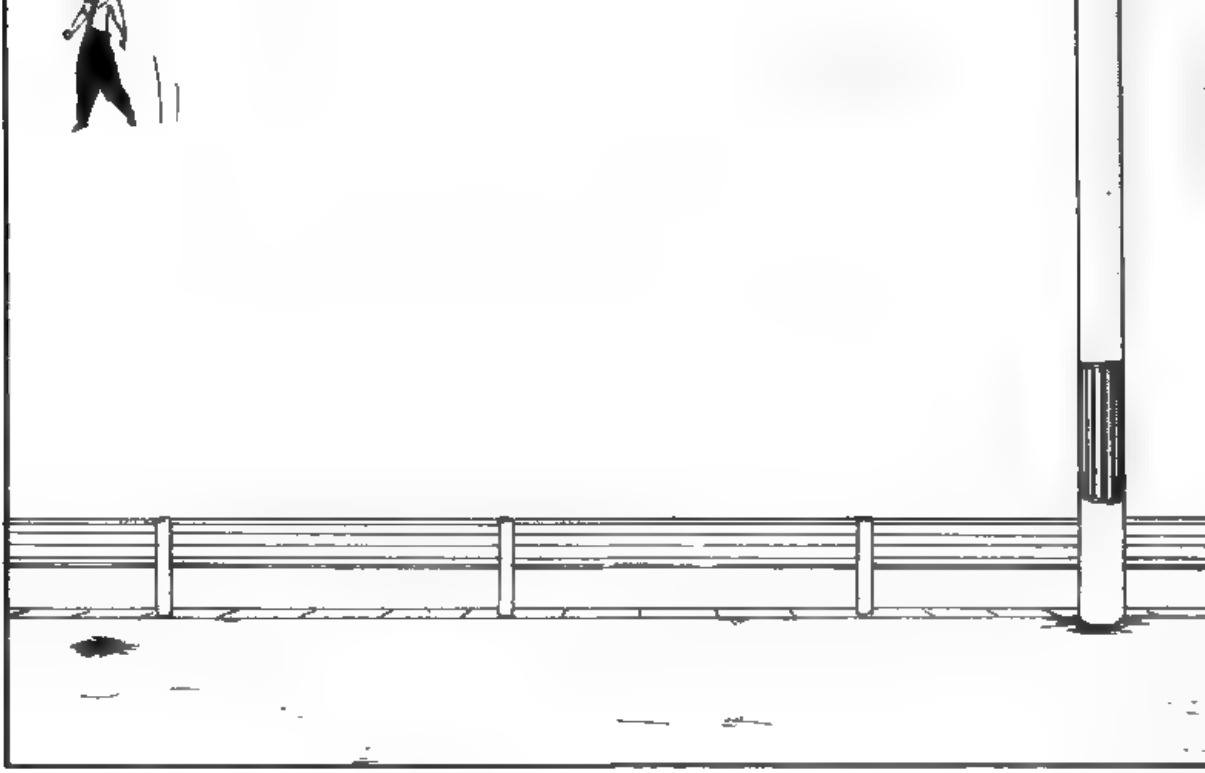


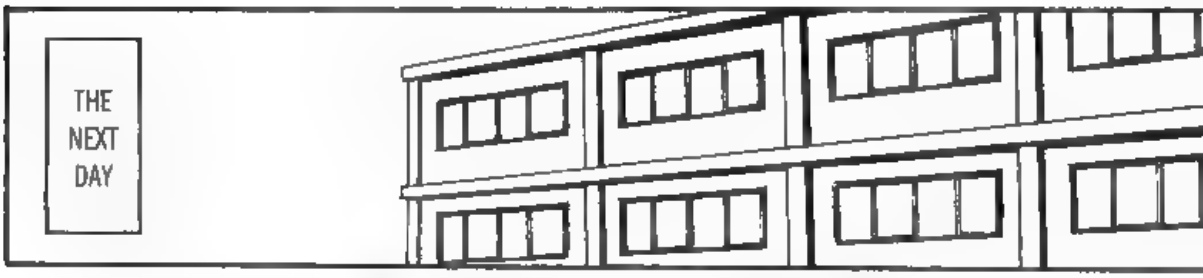






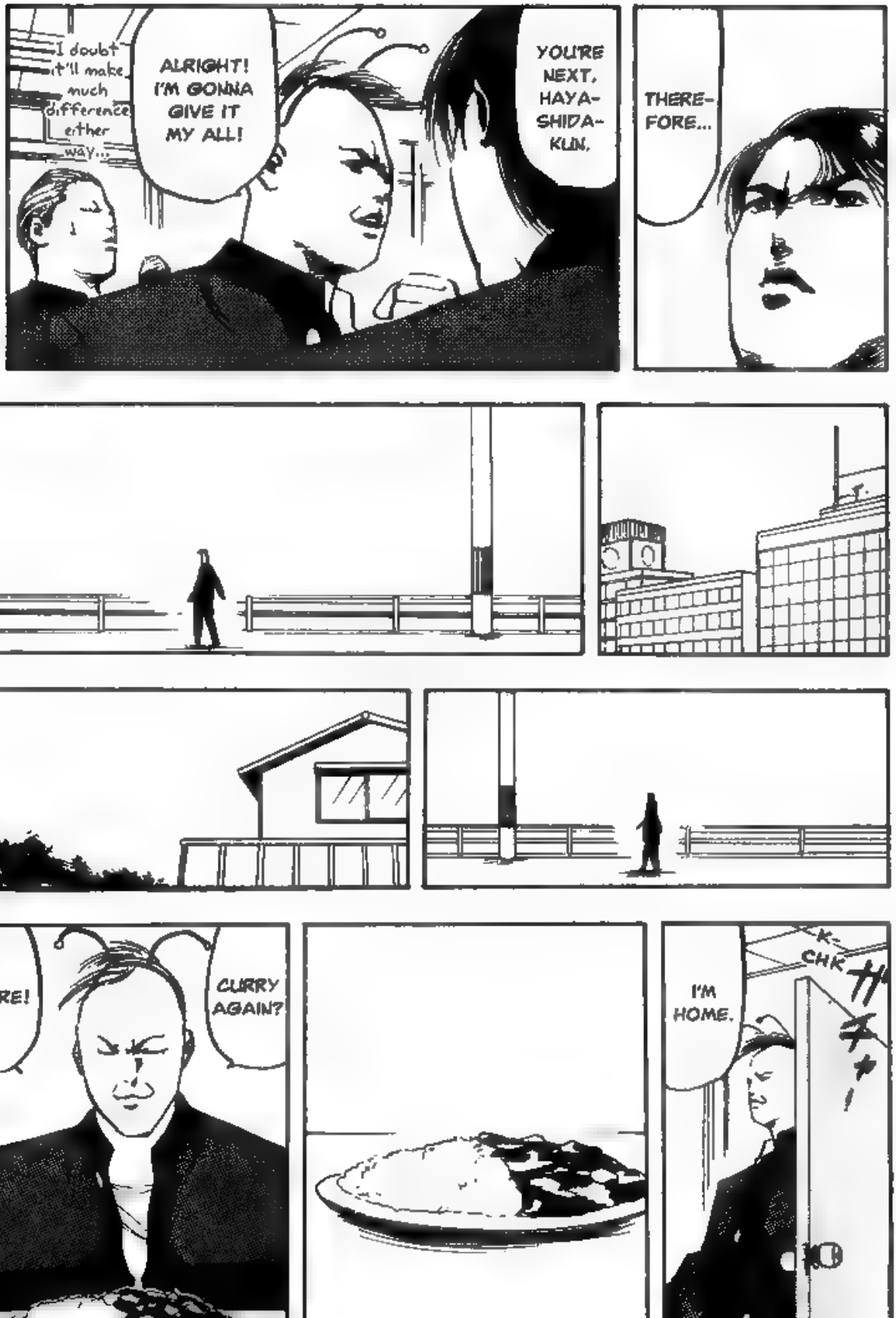




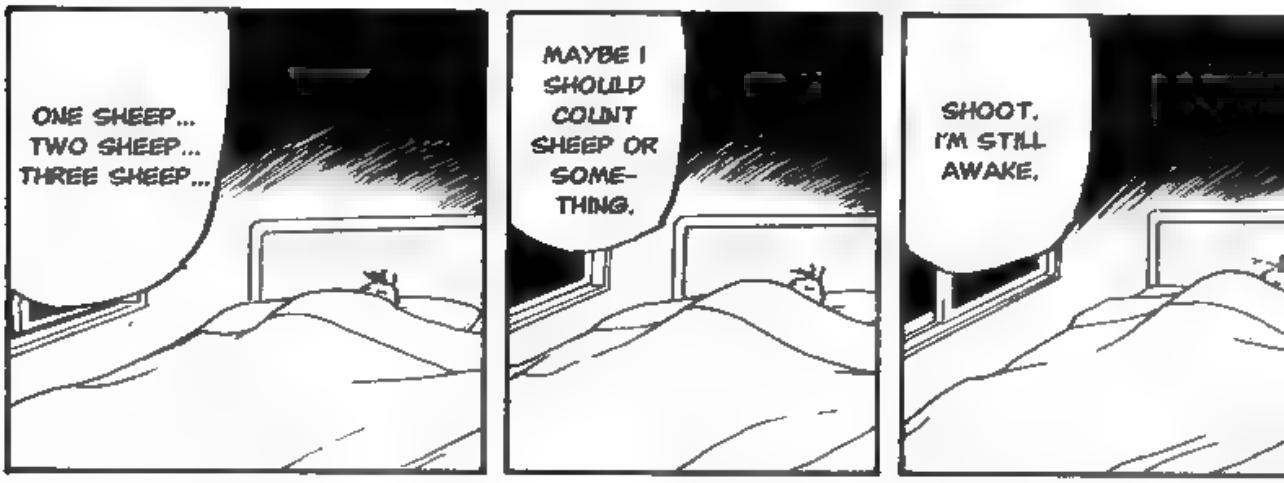


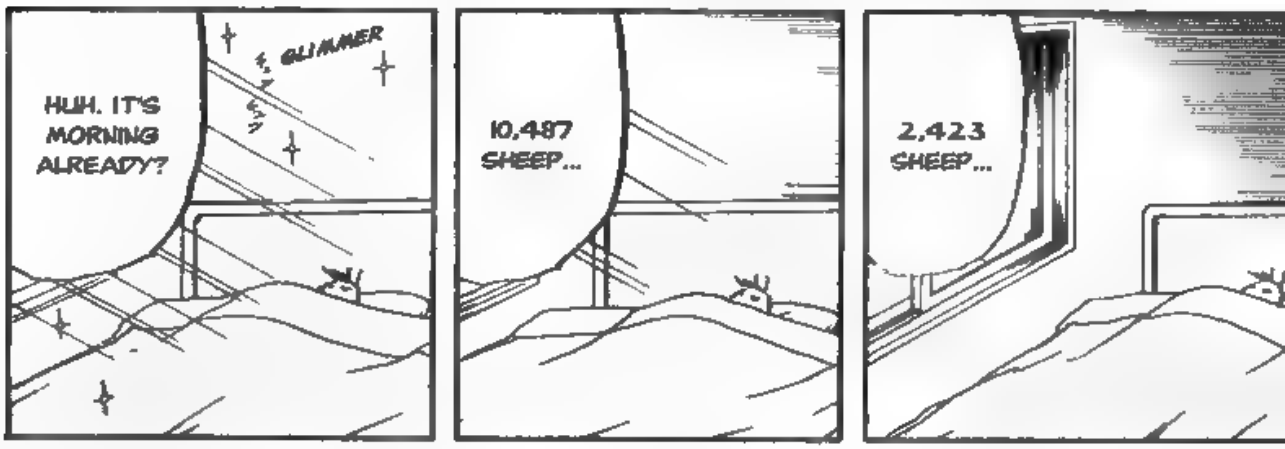
WHOA!

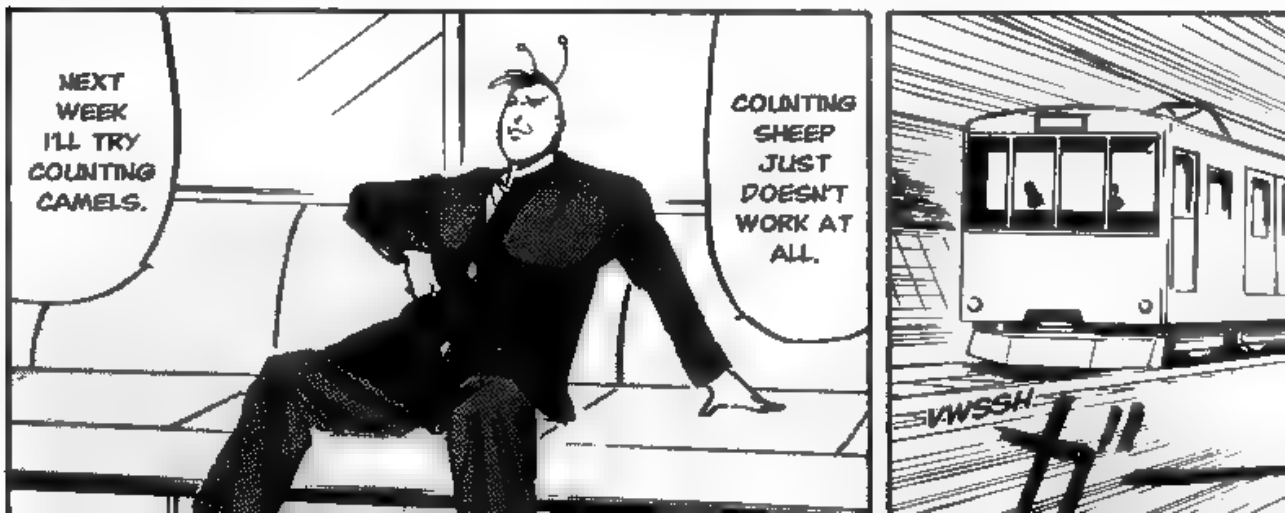
CHAPTER 133: **THE LAST TIME**



IT'S GETTIN' LATE. GUESS I'LL GO TO BED.


ONE SHEEP... TWO SHEEP... THREE SHEEP...
MAYBE I SHOULD COUNT SHEEP OR SOME-THING.
SHOOT. I'M STILL AWAKE.


HUH. IT'S MORNING ALREADY?
GLIMMER
10,487 SHEEP...
2,423 SHEEP...

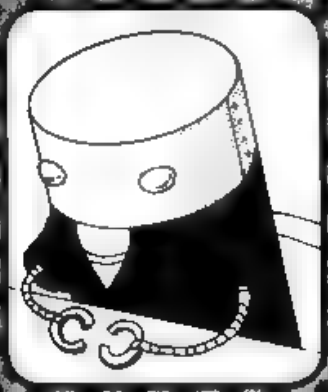

NEXT WEEK I'LL TRY COUNTING CAMELS.
COUNTING SHEEP JUST DOESN'T WORK AT ALL.
VWSSH

WHAT'S THIS?
HM?
NAH, READING MANGA WILL JUST MAKE ME DUMB.
SHONEN MAGAZIN
GOOD MORNING, HAYASHIDA-KUN.
BRRRRRING
HOW DID YOUR DAY GO? DID YOU NOTICE ANYTHING UNUSUAL?
HEY.

THEY'RE ON THE TRAIN.

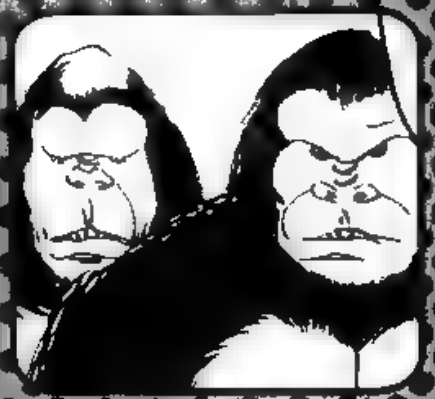
A HAPHAZARD INTRODUCTION TO THE CHARACTERS

SHINICHI MECHAZAWA



Known as "The Fighting Machine of Cromartie," Mechazawa has become the most popular character in this manga. He doesn't appear very often, but it's those unforgettable looks of his that captured the hearts of *Cromartie* readers. Maybe. Yes, hot blood runs through the steel body of this fellow, a manly man who's popular with men and women alike. In this volume, yours truly--in a fit of desperation--put Mechazawa into something of a pickle, but it goes without saying that none of the readers were particularly worried about this.

GORILLAS



These beasts are known as "the animals," 'cuz that's what they are! No need for further explanation. They're primates, and their catchphrase (if you can call it that) is "Ooga?" Even yours truly doesn't know if gorillas really vocalize that way or not--I've never heard one before. (LOL) At one point, there was a whole bunch of them, but they went away. I forget how many I had appear in the story.

MASKED TAKENOUCHI

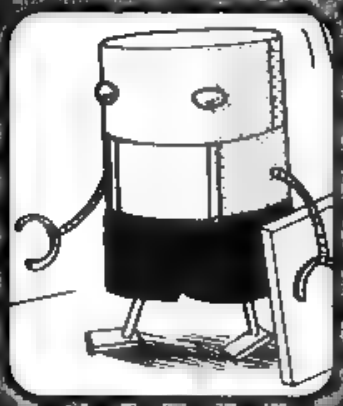
Known as "the Masked Noble of the Heisei Era," Masked Takenouchi has become a familiar face in this manga and readers seem unfazed by a mask-wearing high school student. That being said, having a student who wears a mask with his school uniform is enough to no longer qualify this as a joke-driven manga. Aah, what a headache.

A HAPHAZARD INTRODUCTION TO THE CHARACTERS

NOBORU YAMAGUCHI

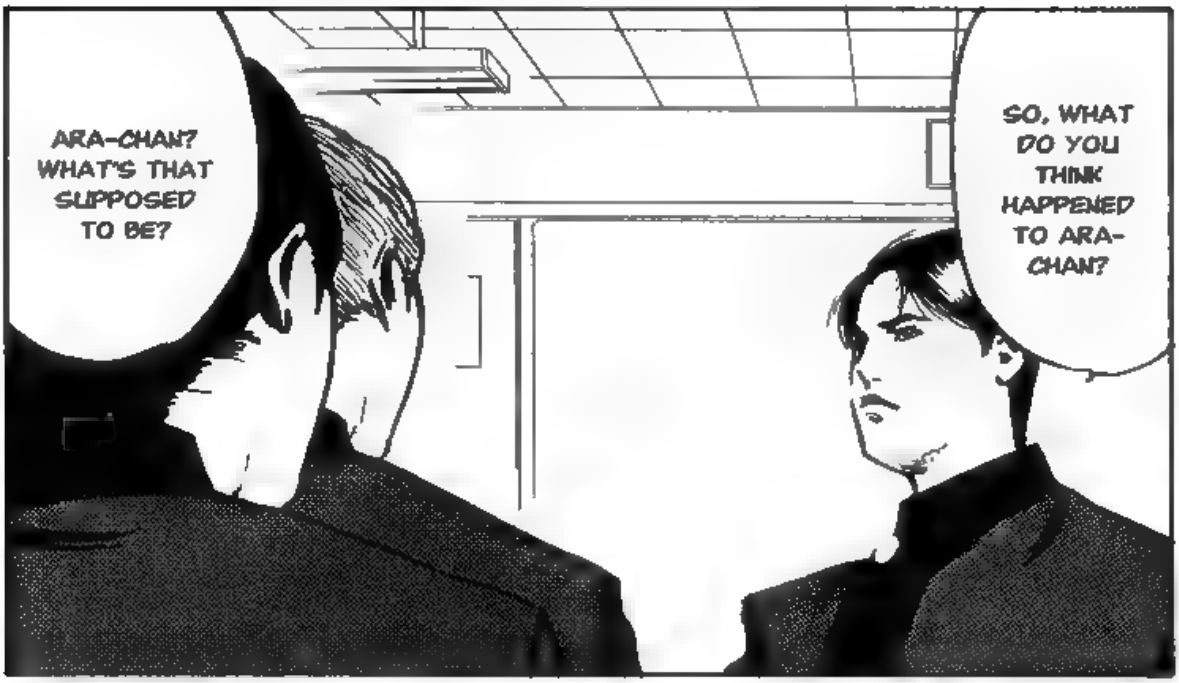
Leader of Destrade High's 1st years, Yamaguchi is known as "the Greatest of the Joke Submitters." Actually, no one is aware that this gang boss so diligently submits jokes to late-night radio programs, so he is never called this. Yamaguchi previously thought *Pootan* was insipid and was enraged by its popularity, but he has since become a convert. Ishikawa no longer gets his ass kicked when he says that *Pootan* is "awesome" or that he's "a *Pootan* fan."

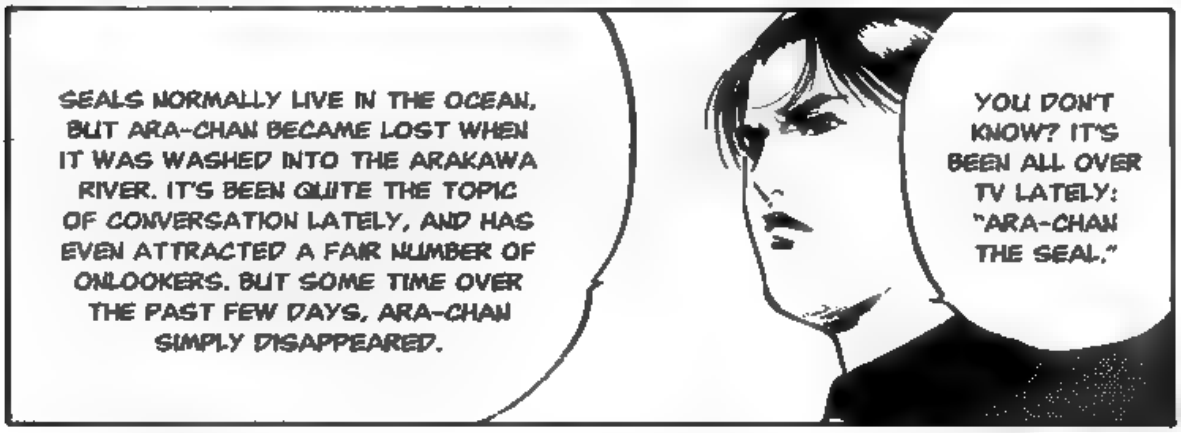
MECHAZAWA BETA



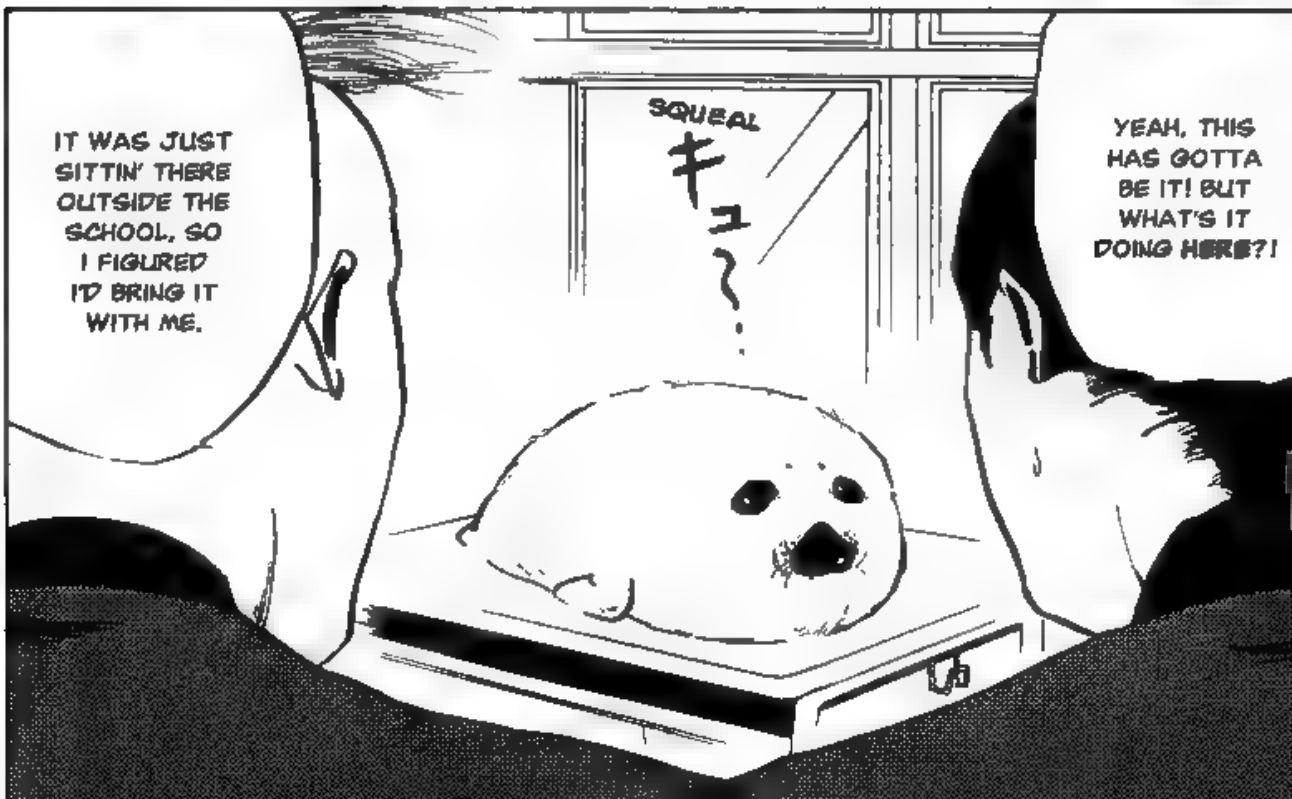
Known as "the lightest lightweight in the business." Beta is Mechazawa's little brother. He is quite small and tends to get broken (and repaired) quite often. Beta is a precocious child who looks oh-so-cute in his suspenders. As Mechazawa's younger brother, you'd think that he'd be a newer model with more and superior functionality...but unlike his big brother, he can't even carry on a conversation. In fact, the only word he can say is "Mekalatta," which he repeats over and over. I wonder if this even counts as joke-worthy material. (LOL)

CHAPTER 134: **LOVE BITES**

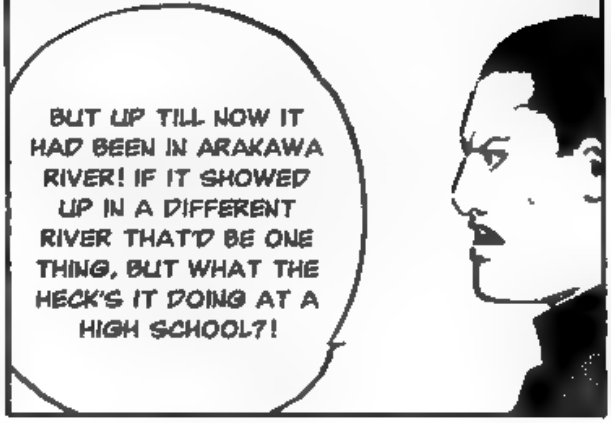



SEALS NORMALLY LIVE IN THE OCEAN, BUT ARA-CHAN BECAME LOST WHEN IT WAS WASHED INTO THE ARAKAWA RIVER. IT'S BEEN QUITE THE TOPIC OF CONVERSATION LATELY, AND HAS EVEN ATTRACTED A FAIR NUMBER OF ONLOOKERS. BUT SOME TIME OVER THE PAST FEW DAYS, ARA-CHAN SIMPLY DISAPPEARED.
YOU DON'T KNOW? IT'S BEEN ALL OVER TV LATELY: "ARA-CHAN THE SEAL."

WHAT?!
THIS?
SQUEAL
キュ〜


IT WAS JUST SITTIN' THERE OUTSIDE THE SCHOOL, SO I FIGURED I'D BRING IT WITH ME.
SQUEAL
キュ〜
YEAH, THIS HAS GOTTA BE IT! BUT WHAT'S IT DOING HERE?!

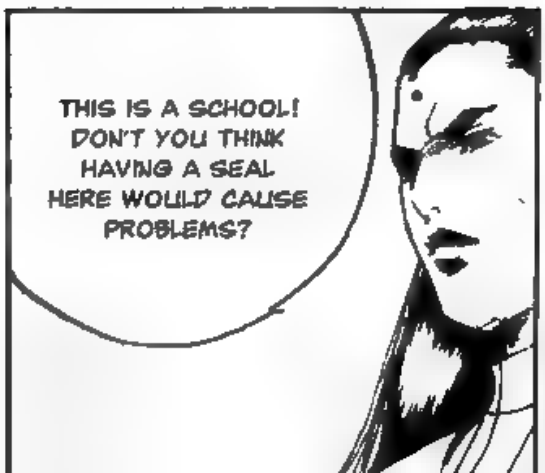
HUH?
PERHAPS IT'S NOT THAT SIMPLE.


BUT UP TILL NOW IT HAD BEEN IN ARAKAWA RIVER! IF IT SHOWED UP IN A DIFFERENT RIVER THAT'D BE ONE THING, BUT WHAT THE HECK'S IT DOING AT A HIGH SCHOOL?!

THUS, WANTING DESPERATELY TO ESCAPE THE CURIOUS AND PRYING EYES OF OUR SOCIETY, IT MADE ITS WAY HERE.
ARA-CHAN MAY WELL HAVE GROWN WEARY OF BEING SURROUNDED BY ALL THOSE PEOPLE, AND OF BEING MADE INTO AN OBJECT FOR THEIR AMUSEMENT.

I THINK IT WOULD BE BEST IF WE KEPT IT HERE FOR A WHILE, FOR ITS OWN PROTECTION.

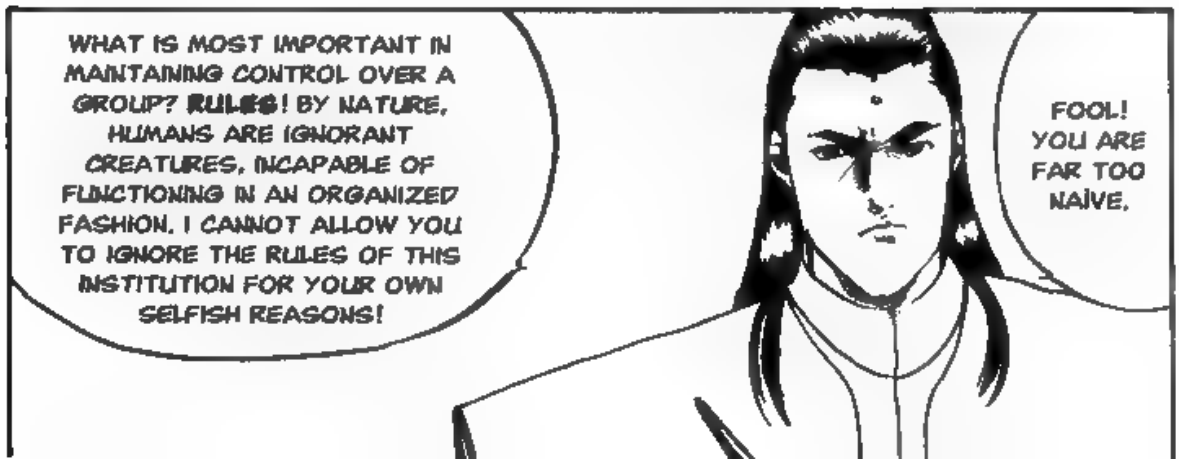
I WAS MERELY SPECU-LATING FROM THE SEAL'S POINT OF VIEW.
YEAH, BUT WE WON'T KNOW FOR SURE UNLESS WE ASK IT.
SQUEAL


THIS IS A SCHOOL! DON'T YOU THINK HAVING A SEAL HERE WOULD CAUSE PROBLEMS?

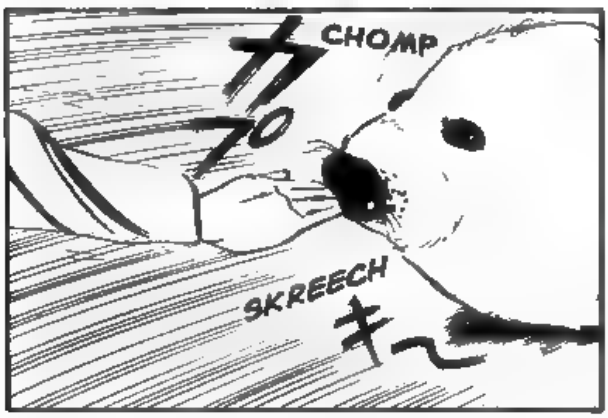
HOKUTO!
YOU MUSTN'T LET YOUR-SELVES GET CARRIED AWAY.

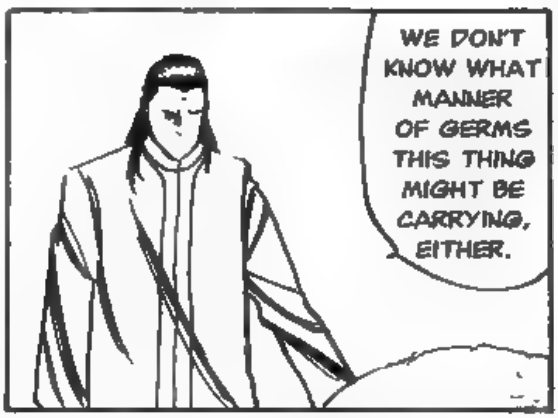
TRUE.
GRANTED, SUCH A CREATURE WOULD BE SOMETHING OF AN ODDITY...

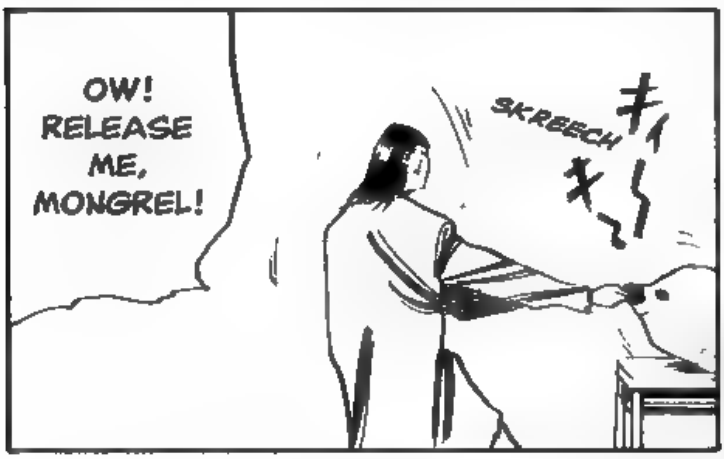
IF YOU THINK OF IT MERELY IN TERMS OF, "THERE'S A LITTLE SEAL THAT NEEDS OUR HELP," YOU'D WANT TO DO WHAT YOU COULD, WOULDN'T YOU?
BUT I DON'T THINK THERE'S ANY HARM IN BENDING THE RULES A LITTLE.


WHAT IS MOST IMPORTANT IN MAINTAINING CONTROL OVER A GROUP? **RULES**! BY NATURE, HUMANS ARE IGNORANT CREATURES, INCAPABLE OF FUNCTIONING IN AN ORGANIZED FASHION. I CANNOT ALLOW YOU TO IGNORE THE RULES OF THIS INSTITUTION FOR YOUR OWN SELFISH REASONS!
FOOL! YOU ARE FAR TOO NAIVE.

HOKUTO-KUN CAN BE PRETTY STUBBORN, HUH?
I DENOUNCE THIS ILL-ADVISED PLAN OF YOURS!


CHOMP
SKREECH


WE DON'T KNOW WHAT MANNER OF GERMS THIS THING MIGHT BE CARRYING, EITHER.


OW! RELEASE ME, MONGREL!
SKREECH

GAH!

BASTARDS! DID YOU SEE THAT JUST NOW?! THIS IS A BRUTAL, FEROCIOUS BEAST!

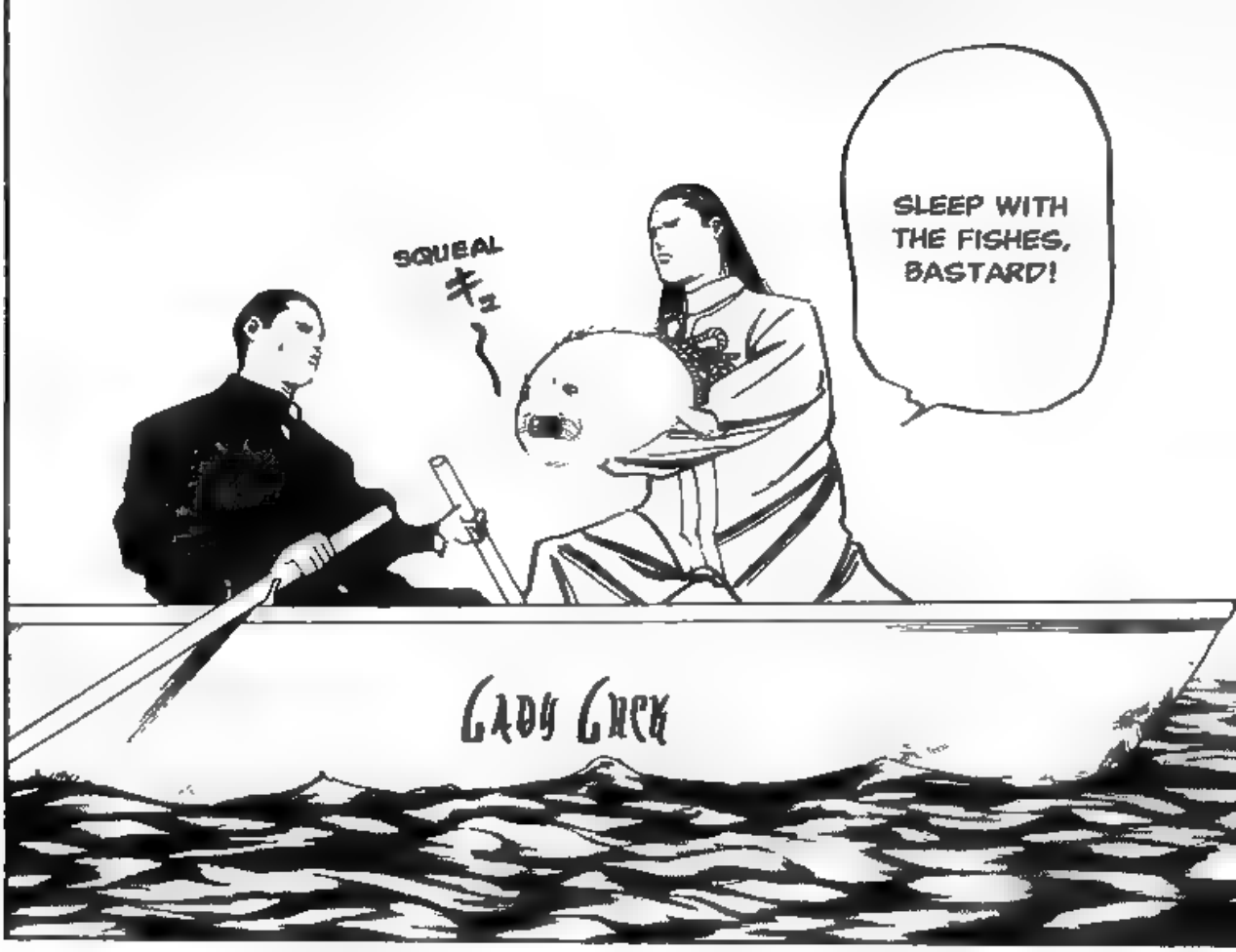
DAMN THAT HURTS...

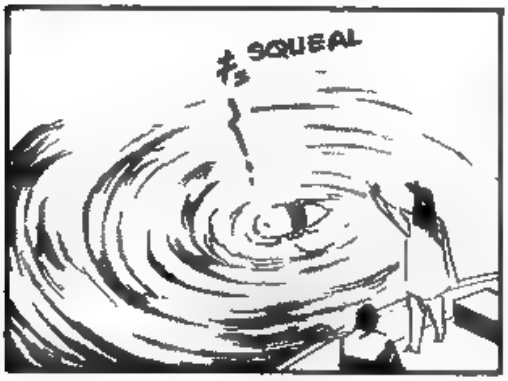
NRGH!
DID YOU SAY SOME-THING?
Aww, you're so cute...
SQUEAL

INDEED. YOU SHOULD BE MORE UNDERSTANDING OF OUR ANIMAL BRETHREN, HOKUTO-KUN.
THIS CUTE LIL GUY? NAH, NO WAY.
SQUEAL
DID YOU NOT SEE THAT?! THIS PIECE OF OFFAL JUST TRIED TO DEVOUR MY HAND!

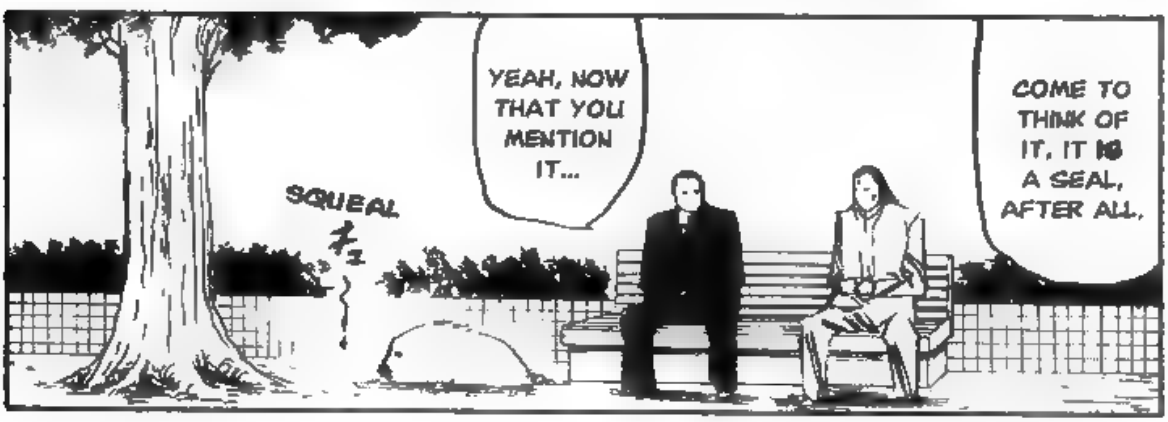
ITS CONSTANT **SUCK-UPPERY** HAS INGRATIATED ITSELF WITH THE OTHERS! BUT LET ME TELL YOU, THAT BEAST IS ABOUT TO LEARN THE UNMITIGATED TERROR THAT COMES WITH CROSSING A HOKUTO...
WRETCH-ED SEAL!

YES! AND I DON'T MEAN "KILL" IN THE FIGURATIVE SENSE OF INFLICTING GREAT PAIN UPON IT--I AM GOING TO TAKE ITS LIFE!
HUH? KILL IT?
IN SHORT, I'M GOING TO KILL IT!
WELL, IF YOU WANTED TO DO IT GANGSTER STYLE, YOU COULD SHOOT IN THE HEAD OR DROWN IT IN TOKYO BAY.
ALL I REQUIRE IS A SPECIFIC METHOD FOR DISPOSING OF THE CREATURE. WHAT WOULD BE THE BEST WAY, I WONDER.
WHAT'S MORE, FIREARMS ARE PROHIBITED BY JAPANESE LAW! SIMPLY POSSESSING ONE IS ENOUGH TO PLACE YOU BEFORE THE COURTS!
OH. YEAH...
THERE'S NO WAY A HIGH-SCHOOL STUDENT IN THIS COUNTRY COULD GET HIS HANDS ON A GUN! USE YOUR HEAD!
THEN IT'S SET-TLED!
YEAH, YOU'RE RIGHT.


SQUEAL
キュ～
SLEEP WITH THE FISHES, BASTARD!
Lady Luck


SQUEAL
キュ

SPLOSH
SEE YA.


YEAH, NOW THAT YOU MENTION IT...
SQUEAL
キュ
COME TO THINK OF IT, IT IS A SEAL, AFTER ALL.

IT CAN SWIM.

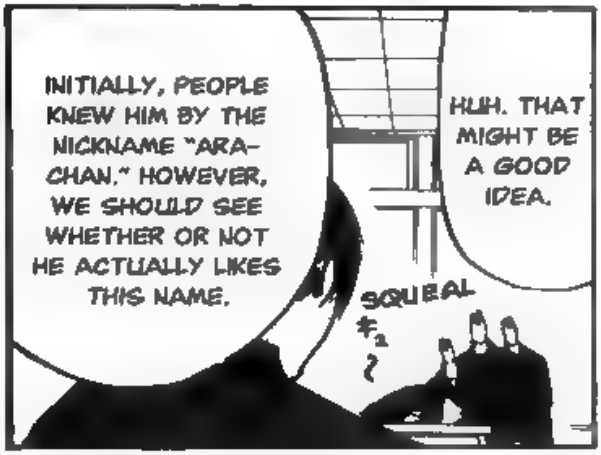
CHAPTER 135: **PAINT IT BLACK**

I THINK PUTTIN' CLOTHES ON ANIMALS KINDA REFLECTS THE SELF-CENTEREDNESS OF THE HUMAN EGO. DON'T YOU?
YES?
HOLD ON.
"PLEASED"? HOW THE HECK WOULD YOU KNOW?
SQUEAL
NOT TO WORRY. IT IS PLEASED.
WHAT? Y-YES/NO RESPONSES?!
I'VE LEARNED IT CAN COMMUNICATE INTENT VIA SIMPLE YES/NO RESPONSES.
YES. IT SQUEALS WHEN IT MEANS "YES" AND SCREECHES WHEN IT MEANS "NO." SHALL WE TEST IT OUT?
THAT'S AMAZ-ING!
WELL, FREDDIE IS MORE OR LESS HUMAN, SO NO. AND THE WAY YOU PUT THAT WAS RATHER RUDE.
SO IT'S MORE ADVANCED THAN FREDDIE?!

SQUEAL
FIRST, I'LL PLACE SOME COLD ICE CREAM NEXT TO IT.
ICE
SKREECH
THEN I'LL PLACE SOME PIPING-HOT BOILED TOFU NEXT TO IT.
SIMMER
YEAH, WELL, YOUR AVERAGE SEAL DON'T LIKE HOT THINGS, Y'KNOW.
SQUEAL
HUH. SO IT'S OK WITH ICE CREAM BUT IT DOESN'T LIKE BOILED TOFU!
YOU SEE?
UM, THERE'S NO NEED TO GET INTO A DISCUSSION ON THAT RIGHT NOW.
SQUEAL
I don't get it.
THEY LIVE IN THE OCEAN! HOW WOULD THEY EVEN KNOW WHAT "HOT THINGS" ARE?!
HOLD ON. THEY DON'T LIKE HOT THINGS? BUT...

OF COURSE, THIS NAME WOULD BE CHOSEN IN ACCORDANCE WITH HIS OWN WISHES.
SQUEAL
IN ANY EVENT, I WAS THINKING WE SHOULD GIVE HIM A PROPER NAME.

ARA-CHAN!


INITIALLY, PEOPLE KNEW HIM BY THE NICKNAME "ARA-CHAN." HOWEVER, WE SHOULD SEE WHETHER OR NOT HE ACTUALLY LIKES THIS NAME.
HUH. THAT MIGHT BE A GOOD IDEA.
SQUEAL

I GUESS WE WON'T KNOW WHAT HE LIKES UNLESS WE ASK HIM DIRECTLY, HUH?
THE SCREECH MEANS NO, SO "ARA-CHAN" IS NO GOOD.

SKREECH

SKREECH

WHAT ABOUT TAKING THE "CRO" FROM CROMARTIE TO MAKE "CRO-CHAN"?

HMPH! WHAT ARE YOU VERMIN UP TO NOW?
I GUESS SEALS HAVE GOT PREFERENCES OF THEIR OWN... SO WHAT DO WE DO?
ANOTHER "NO." THIS IS KINDA DIFFICULT.
SQUEAL
キュ
HOKUTO-KUN!
THEN THAT MEANS...
HEY, DID YA HEAR THAT? HE JUST SQUEALED! HE LIKES THAT NAME, RIGHT?
HUH?!
WAIT JUST A MOMENT! WHAT'S THIS ALL ABOUT?
YUP! THIS LITTLE GUY'S NAME IS HOKUTO-KUN!

ENOUGH OF YOUR FOOLISHNESS!
THEREFORE, YOU NEED TO PLEASE CHANGE YOUR NAME.
THIS IS ABSURD! DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA WHAT YOU'RE SAYING?!
SQUEAL
WE'VE DECIDED THAT AS OF TODAY, THE SEAL'S NEW NAME IS "HOKUTO-KUN."
THAT SEAL IS BAD NEWS.
YEOW!
SKREECH
CHOMP
IN A WAY, THIS IS AN AFFRONT TO YOU AS WELL. AFTER ALL, THE SEAL WAS GIVEN A NAME BEFORE YOU WERE.
YES. SOMETHING WILL HAVE TO BE DONE ABOUT THIS, AND SOON.
MORE AND MORE PEOPLE ARE FALLING UNDER ITS SPELL...AND NOW IT LOOKS LIKE HE'S AFTER YOUR NAME!
WHO DO THOSE PEOPLE THINK THEY ARE, CALLING THAT IDIOTIC SEAL "HOKUTO"?! THIS IS INTOLERABLE!
"IN ANY CASE"? JEEZ!
IS THAT RIGHT? WELL, IN ANY CASE...
ACTUALLY, I **HAVE** BEEN GIVEN A NAME, BUT NO ONE SEEMS WILLING TO REMEMBER IT.

WHAT?! TELL ME!
I CAN THINK OF A PRETTY GOOD WAY, HOKUTO-SAN.
IF ONLY THERE WERE SOME WAY TO SHATTER THE EGO OF THAT ACCURSED BEAST!
IT'S A SIMPLE TRICK, BUT IT DOES WONDERS FOR SHREDDING A GUY'S EGO.
IT'D IS AN IDIOT
BACK IN JUNIOR HIGH, DIDN'T YOU EVER WRITE "IDIOT" OR SOMETHING ON A PIECE OF PAPER AND STICK IT ON SOMEONE'S BACK?
. . . . . .
WHY NOT DO THE SAME KIND OF THING TO THAT SEAL? YOU COULD TAKE A MAGIC MARKER AND WRITE SOMETHING DISPARAGING ON ITS BACK!
THEN LEAVE IT TO ME! I MAY NOT LOOK IT, BUT I'M AN EXPERT AT KNOCKING PEOPLE DOWN TO SIZE!
HMM. THAT MAY INDEED PROVE EFFECTIVE...

IT WAS PROBABLY DELIBERATE.

CHAPTER 136: CHANGE

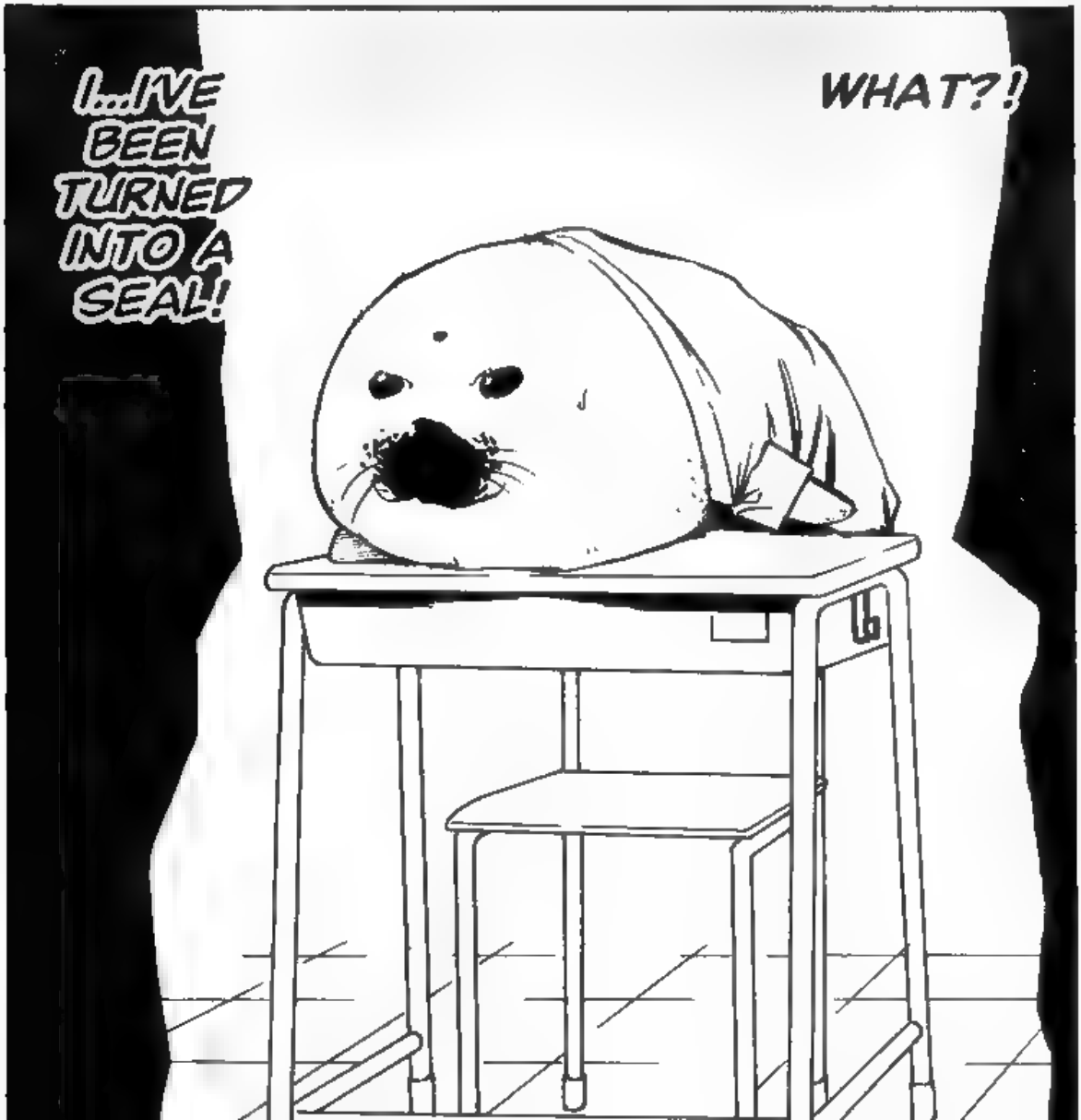
MY NAME IS TAKESHI HOKUTO. I AM HEIR TO MY FAMILY'S ZAIBATSU CONGLOMERATE AND NEXT IN LINE TO LEAD THE HOKUTO GROUP. I AM THE CHOSEN ONE, HE WHO WAS BORN TO RULE THE MASSES.

HUH?

.....

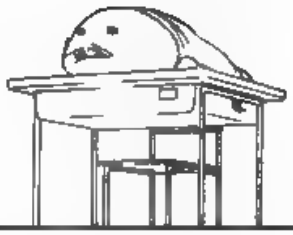
I...IVE BEEN TURNED INTO A SEAL!

WHAT?!



LET'S SEE. LAST NIGHT I HAD DINNER AT HOME. I WATCHED SOME TV...THAT'S ALL I REMEMBER.

HOW COULD THIS HAVE HAPPENED?! OK. CALM DOWN, HOKUTO. JUST CALM DOWN AND THINK THIS OVER.



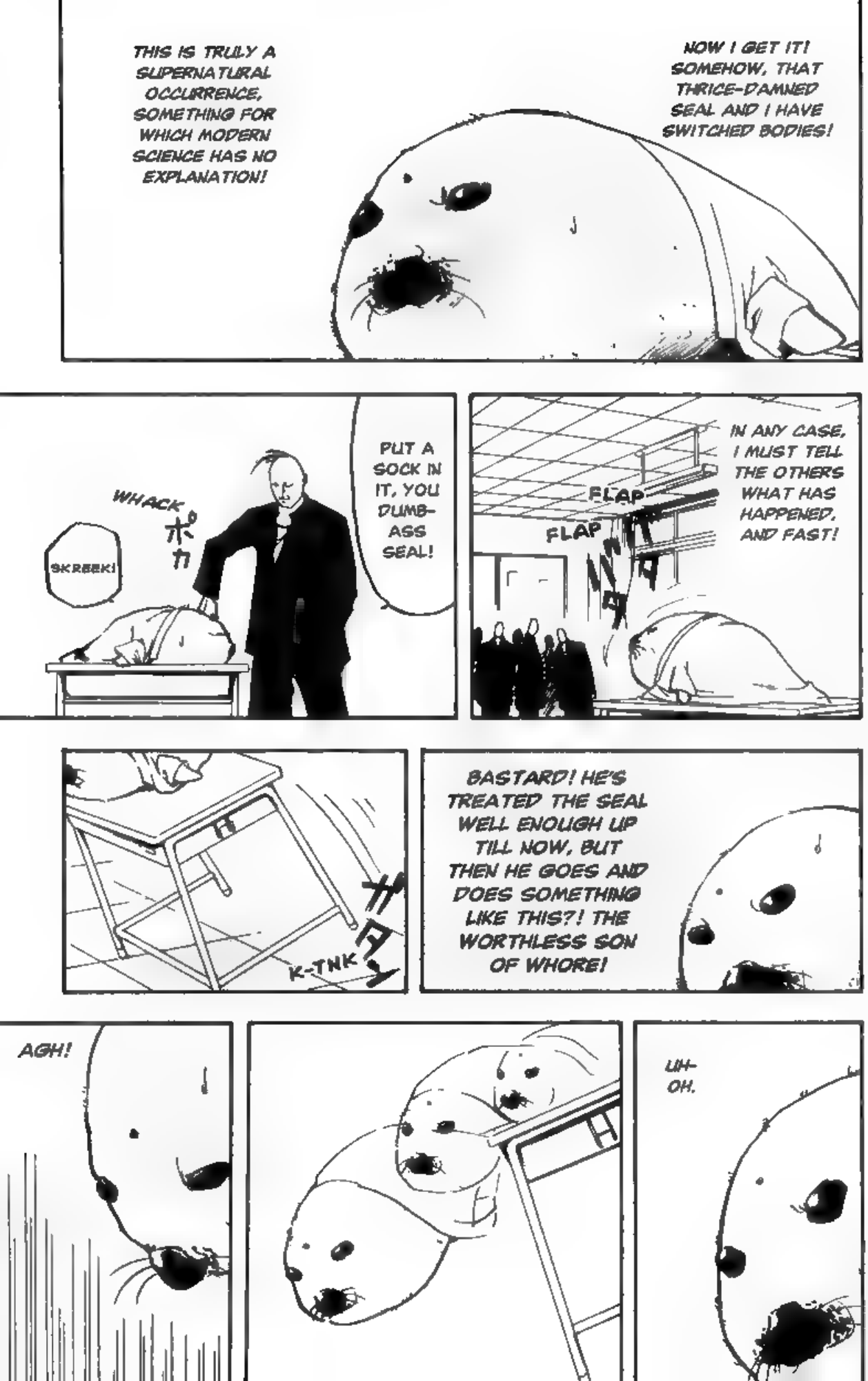
RATTLE

I CAN'T DO IT! I CAN'T STAY CALM AND THINK THINGS OVER WHEN I LOOK LIKE THIS!

WHAT?! THAT THING IS **ME**?!

SQUEAL.

HEY THERE, HOKUTO.


THIS IS TRULY A SUPERNATURAL OCCURRENCE, SOMETHING FOR WHICH MODERN SCIENCE HAS NO EXPLANATION!
NOW I GET IT! SOMEHOW, THAT THRICE-DAMNED SEAL AND I HAVE SWITCHED BODIES!
WHACK
ポカ
SKREEK!
PUT A SOCK IN IT, YOU DUMB-ASS SEAL!
FLAP
FLAP
IN ANY CASE, I MUST TELL THE OTHERS WHAT HAS HAPPENED, AND FAST!
K-TNK
BASTARD! HE'S TREATED THE SEAL WELL ENOUGH UP TILL NOW, BUT THEN HE GOES AND DOES SOMETHING LIKE THIS?! THE WORTHLESS SON OF WHORE!
AGH!
UH-OH.

THWOMP
スン
.....

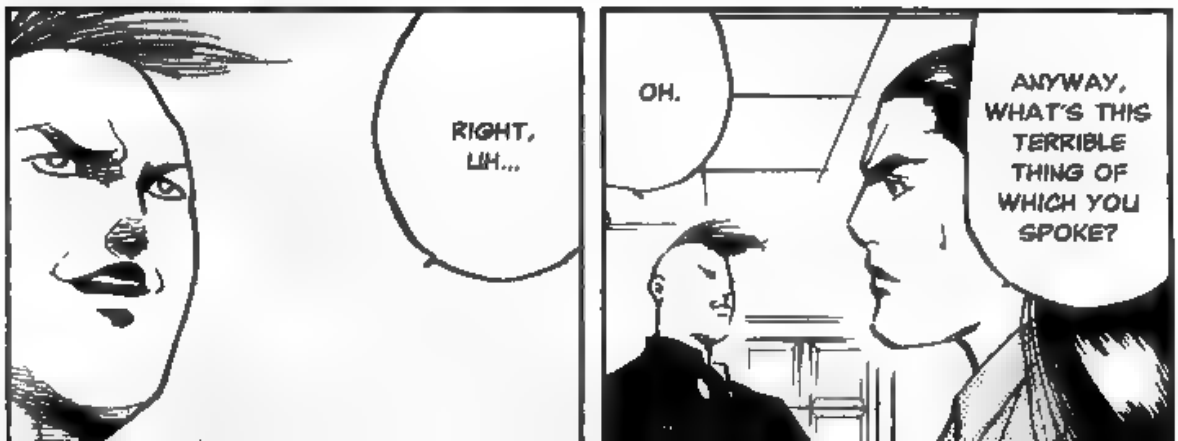
IT WAS A DREAM?
はぁ HUFF
はぁ HUFF

Y-YES.
AH. YOU'RE AWAKE, YOUNG MASTER.

ANOTHER OF YOUR SERVANTS GREETED HIM, SO I AM AFRAID I DO NOT KNOW. HOWEVER, IT SEEMS THIS INDIVIDUAL IS ALREADY ON HIS WAY TO SEE YOU.
WHO IS IT?
THERE IS SOMEONE HERE TO SEE YOU.
SOMETHIN' TERRIBLE HAS HAPPENED!
HOKUTO!
SLAM
バタン
AH!
Y-YOU'RE...
IT'S YOU!

. . . . . .
PLEASE FORGIVE THE SUDDEN INTRUSION.
IT HAS BEEN SOME TIME, SIR.

I DON'T EVEN KNOW THIS DUDE!
MOST THOROUGHLY UNRELATED, SIR.
UM, ARE YOU TWO SURE YOU'RE NOT RELATED?


RIGHT, UH...
OH.
ANYWAY, WHAT'S THIS TERRIBLE THING OF WHICH YOU SPOKE?

YOU DON'T SAY.
I HAVE A TENDENCY TO FORGET THINGS... BUT ONLY WHEN THEY'RE IMPORTANT.
WHAT?!
AFTER ALL THAT EXCITE-MENT, I KINDA FORGOT.
IT IS MORNING.
AH! I'D LOVE TO! I HAVEN'T EATEN A THING SINCE THIS MORNING!
HAVE YOU ALREADY EATEN, MASTER HAYASHIDA? IF NOT, WOULD YOU CARE TO JOIN US AT THE TABLE?
JUST BE QUIET AND EAT.
GNAW
YOU EAT FANCY-ASS STUFF LIKE THIS FOR BREAK-FAST?!
TNK
TNK
MIND IF I LIE DOWN ON YOUR SOFA FOR A BIT?
NOW THAT WAS A MEAL!

WHY DID YOU BOTHER COMING HERE, WORM?!
UH...I'M DRAWIN' A BLANK.
LOOK, WHAT WAS IT THAT WAS SO "TERRIBLE"?
HMPH. I DOUBT IT'S ANYTHING IMPOR-TANT.
BWSH
HEY! I REMEM-BERED!
WHAT?!
MECHAZAWA'S GOT A BOMB ATTACHED TO HIM!
TO BE CONTINUED...

YEAH, THIS IS A PRETTY ORIGINAL MANGA.

A HAPHAZARD INTRODUCTION TO THE CHARACTERS

POOTAN

A comedian who performs in a plush animal outfit. When I first introduced this character, I never in a million years thought I'd get as much mileage out of him as I have. From the simplicity (and by simplicity, I mean "negligence") that typifies his design, you can probably guess that Pootan was intended to be a throwaway character. Every week on his TV show, you'll find him busily engaged in activities such as grinding sesame seeds and filing his income tax returns. Since Pootan has nothing whatsoever to do with Cromartie, it was a source of some consternation to see that the more Pootan showed up, the more the story strayed from its "high-school manga" scenario. This, of course, led to the surprise in noticing that I had *ever* intended for this to be a high-school manga. Huh. Anyway, Pootan's TV program is extremely popular, and Pootan himself is a successful comedian. Not that this ever happen in the real world, though.

POOTAN'S PARTNER

Character-wise, this guy is so insubstantial that after not drawing him for a while I flat-out forgot what he looked like. I have forgotten once again, so the next time he appears, there is a strong possibility that he'll be sporting a different face. This guy plays second fiddle to Pootan on the TV show, which is reason enough for him to not have a name. Whether he and Pootan just work together on the show or if they're a full-time comic duo remains a mystery... namely because I haven't given the matter any thought. Appearances aside, this guy can get pretty hot-tempered.

A HAPHAZARD INTRODUCTION TO THE CHARACTERS

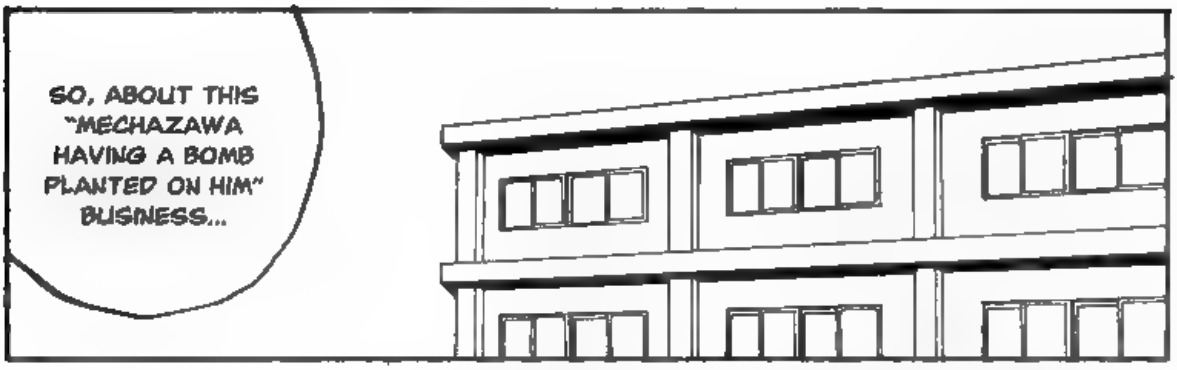
HIDEKI TAKAHASHI

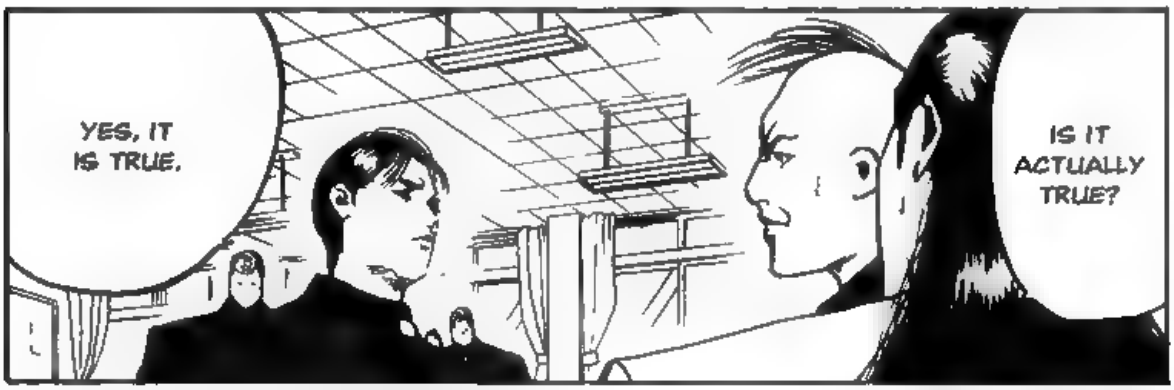
At that den of thugs called Cromartie High, Hideki Takahashi commands the respect of all. Kamiyama, Hayashida and the other underclassmen look up to him with a kind of reverence. Takahashi is someone you can rely on, a man of limitless generosity. In addition to being a skilled fighter, this cool upperclassman is always looking out for his buddies. In other words, Takahashi is the ubiquitous "guy who walks the high road" found in most delinquent manga. It's amazing to see how schlocky he became after I added a little "spice" to the recipe. To stick with the food metaphors, I just wanted to add some subtle undertones to his overall flavor profile... still, there's nothing subtle about those things on his head! (LOL) Nobody knows what they're for, but eyewitness claim they help him locate people he's looking for. Takahashi is the first upperclassman we've seen who actually has his act together. It's just a shame that he has to wear those things everywhere... they end up getting noticed a lot more than the fact that he's a pretty decent guy.

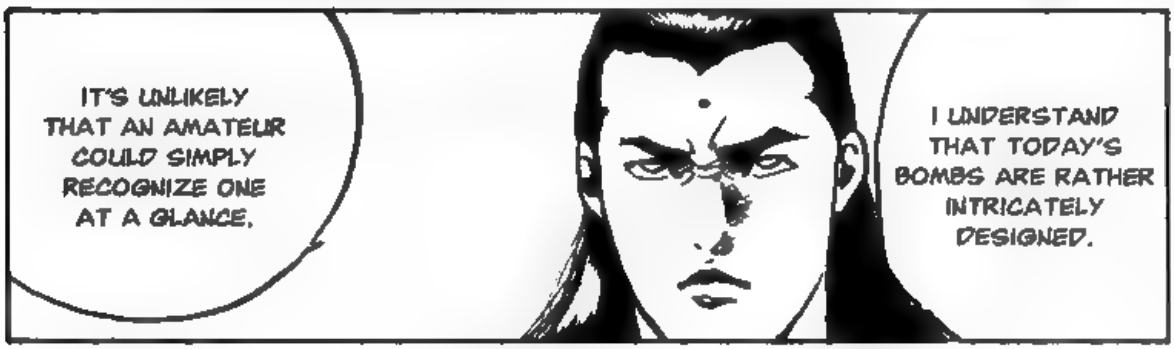
ARA-CHAN

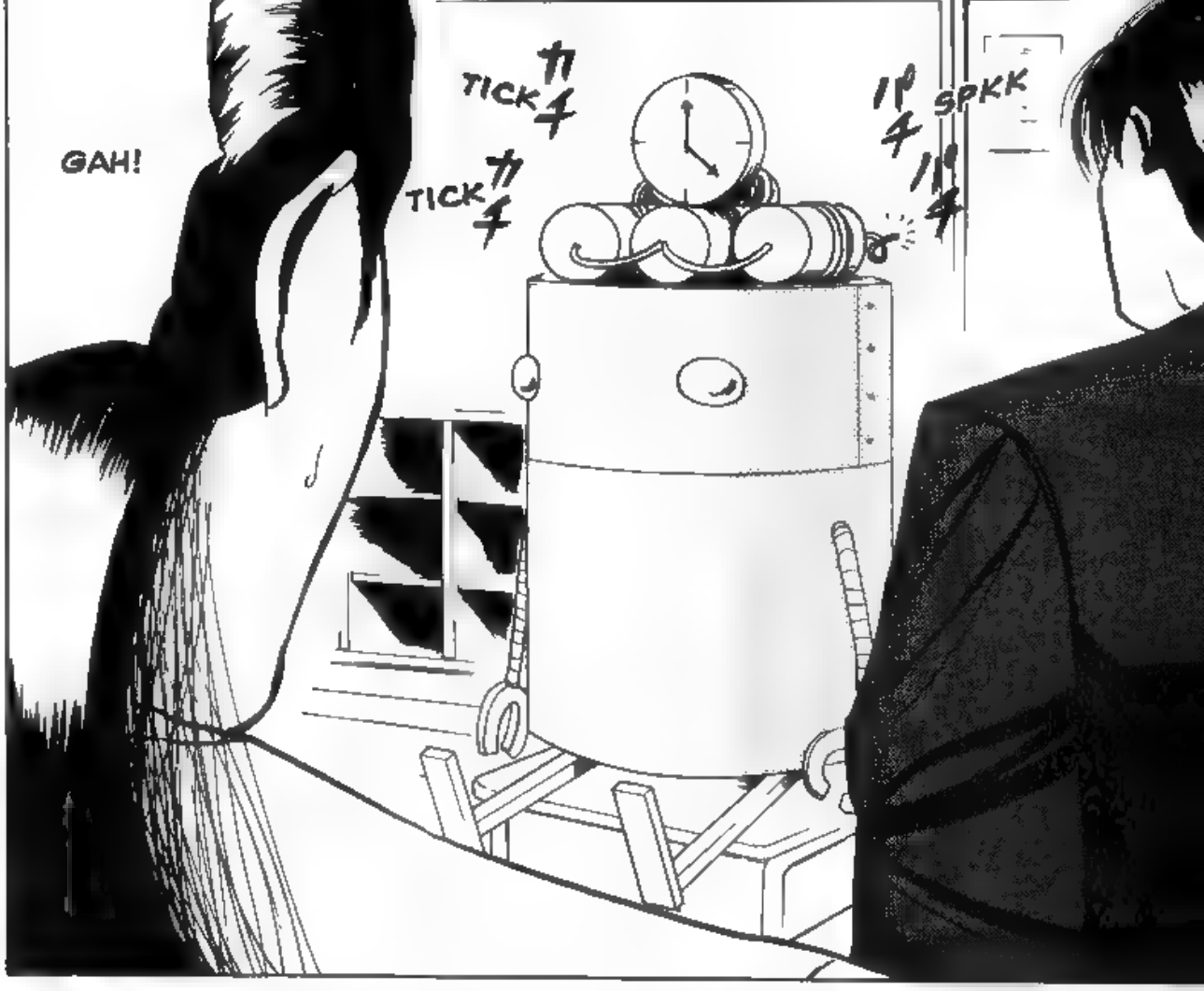
Ara-chan was added almost as an afterthought, a kind of whim that came about while yours truly and his editor were watching TV. Something about all the fuss surrounding Tama-chan, a seal that showed up one day in the Tamagawa river, ticked us off so much that we wanted to pour a little cold water on the party. It makes me nostalgic to remember how the both of us were shouting things at the TV like, "If you wanna see a seal that badly, go to the frickin' zoo!" So anyway, I tried putting a seal into the manga, and it was an instant hit, which was of course the exact *opposite* of what we were after. Grarr... this always happens to us! Anyway, I've never once heard what kinds of sounds a seal makes, so having it go "squeal!" was clearly the influence of some manga or other. (LOL) It's quite unusual for a "delinquent manga" to feature gorillas, seals and whatnot. Can Cromartie even be considered a delinquent manga?! I have a feeling this character will not be making another appearance.

CHAPTER 137: **SPANISH BOMB**

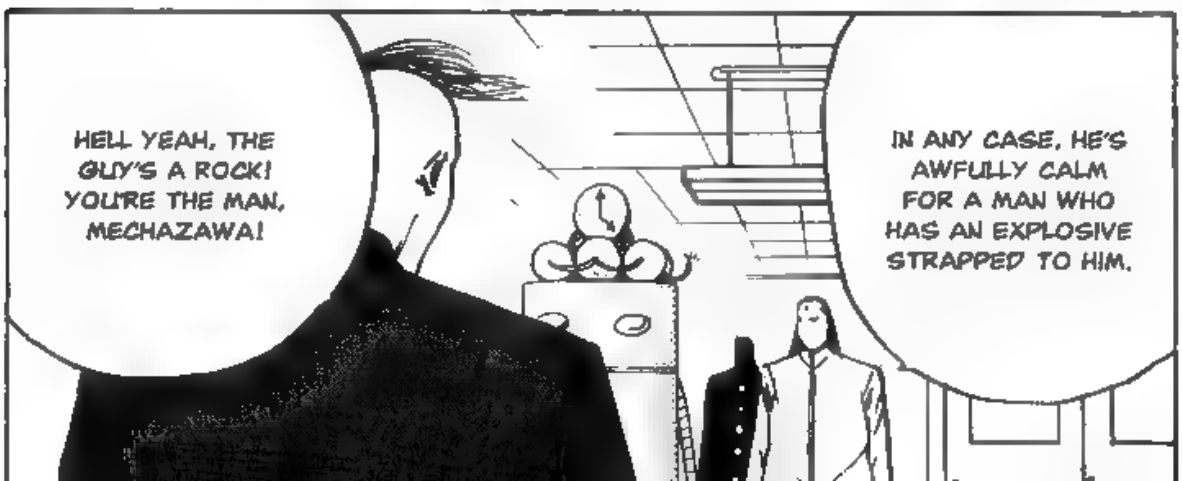





IT'S UNLIKELY THAT AN AMATEUR COULD SIMPLY RECOGNIZE ONE AT A GLANCE.
I UNDERSTAND THAT TODAY'S BOMBS ARE RATHER INTRICATELY DESIGNED.


GAH!
TICK
TICK
SPKK

HOWEVER, IT APPEARS THAT THE DETONATOR IS SOMEWHERE **INSIDE** MECHAZAWA, SO IT WON'T BE THAT EASY TO DISARM.
TICK
TICK
Even more so than if you'd actually labeled it "This is a bomb."
THAT IS ONE EASILY IDENTIFIABLE BOMB.


HELL YEAH, THE GUY'S A ROCK! YOU'RE THE MAN, MECHAZAWA!
IN ANY CASE, HE'S AWFULLY CALM FOR A MAN WHO HAS AN EXPLOSIVE STRAPPED TO HIM.

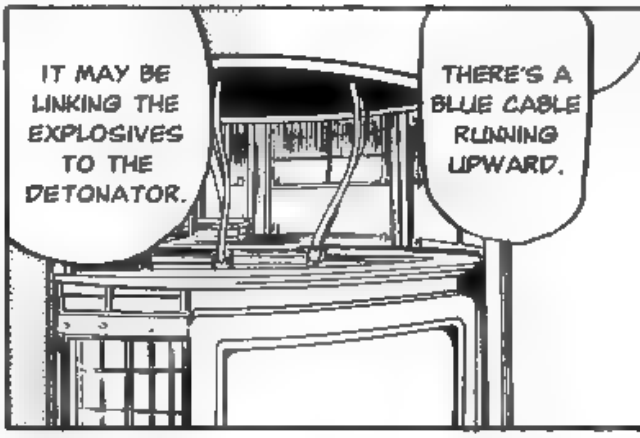
ANYHOW, A BUNCH OF AMATEURS LIKE US COULD NEVER DISARM THIS THING! WHAT WE OUGHT TO DO IS FIND THE GUY WHO DID THIS AND BRING HIS ASS BACK HERE.
AH, R-RIGHT.
ACTUALLY, WE JUST TURNED HIM OFF.
I HAD CONSIDERED THAT AS WELL...
WHY DON'T WE CALL THE COPS?
YES, BUT OUR SCHOOL HAS MANY ENEMIES. IT WILL BE DIFFICULT TO PINPOINT OUR CULPRIT. WHAT'S MORE, WE DON'T HAVE THAT KIND OF TIME.
NO WAY! WE'RE GONNA HAVE TO FIGURE SOMETHING OUT.
AW, MAN! WHEN IT COMES DOWN TO IT, THERE AIN'T A DAMN THING WE CAN DO!
BUT I GET THE FEELING THAT SEVERAL OF THE STUDENTS HERE WOULD END UP GETTING ARRESTED.
SORRY, I'M NOT TOO KNOWLEDGEABLE ABOUT THAT SORT OF THING. MY SPECIALTY IS CHEMICAL WEAPONS.
WHAT ABOUT YOU, MASK?
I DOUBT YOU'LL FIND ANY HIGH SCHOOL-ERS LIKE THAT.
DOES ANYONE HERE KNOW ABOUT BOMBS? OR, LIKE, HAS WORKED WITH 'EM BEFORE?

M-ME?!
WHAT ABOUT YOU, KAMI-YAMA?
SOUTH AMERICA?! DUDE, THE CLOCK'S TICKIN'!
I HAVE A FRIEND WHO KNOWS ABOUT BOMBS, BUT HE'S IN SOUTH AMERICA...
.....
WELL... I ONCE PUT TOGETHER A HOBBY RADIO.
WE'RE OUT OF OPTIONS, CHUMP! HE'S A BETTER CHOICE THAN ANY OF THE REST OF US.
ARE YOU SURE ABOUT THAT?!
ALRIGHT, IT'S SETTLED.
FIRST, I'LL OPEN THIS HATCH HERE ON HIS BACK.
THEN LET'S BEGIN.
WE GOT YOUR TOOLS FOR YA.

IF THE DETONATOR IS LIGHT SENSITIVE, THE MOMENT I OPEN THAT HATCH...
WHAT'S UP?
HMM, WAIT A MOMENT.
CHK
GOTCHA!
WOULD YOU MIND EXTINGUISHING ALL LIGHT IN THIS ROOM?
HUH?!
THERE COULD BE A VERY LOUD "BOOM."
K-CHAK
CREAK
HMM...
CHK
THERE DON'T SEEM TO BE ANY SENSORS... IT SHOULD BE SAFE TO TURN THE LIGHTS BACK ON.
WELL?

OF COURSE NOT! THIS IS A LIFE-AND-DEATH SITUATION!
THERE AIN'T BEEN A SINGLE LAUGH SO FAR.
THIS IS A SERIOUS TURN OF EVENTS, HUH?

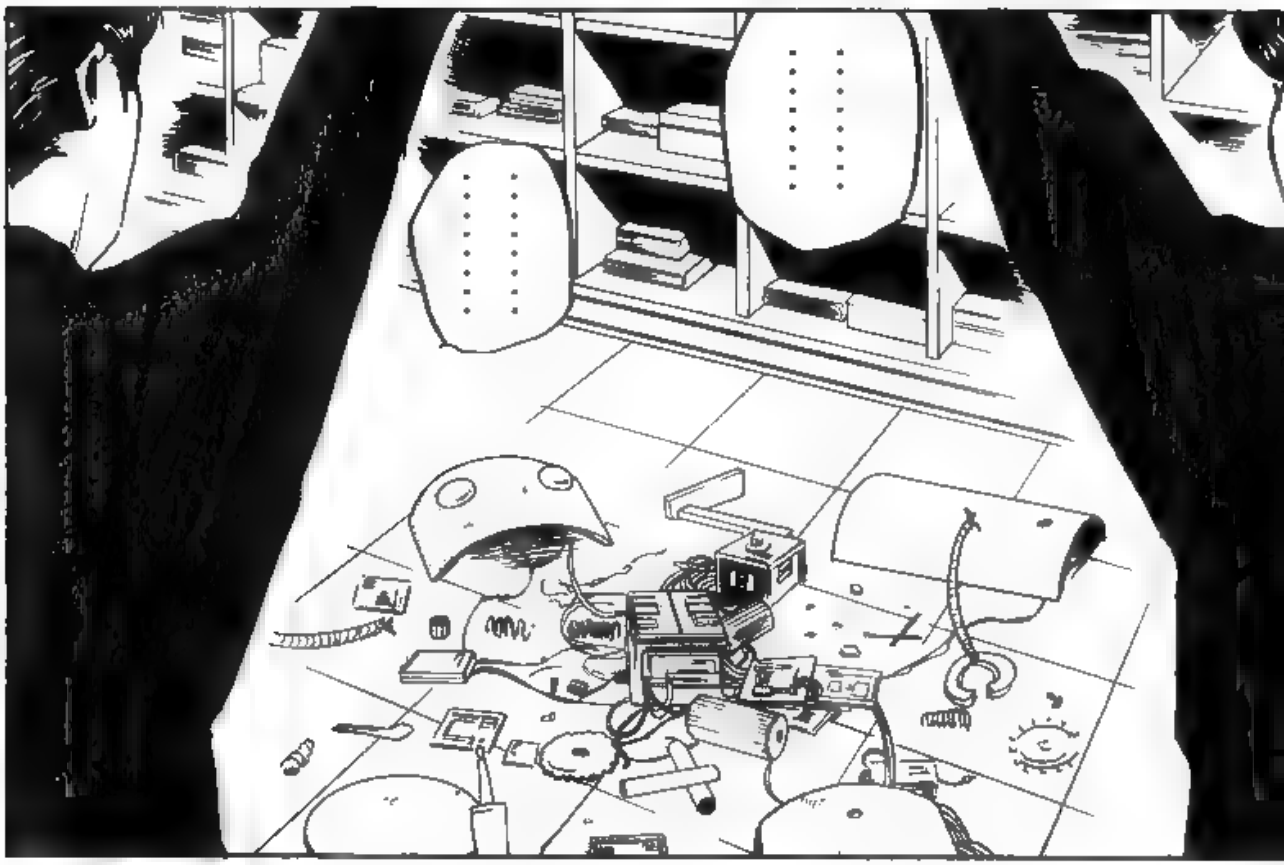
HEY, UH, I HOPE YA DON'T MIND ME ASKIN'...
I'LL REMOVE HIS HEAD AND HAVE A LOOK.


IT MAY BE LINKING THE EXPLOSIVES TO THE DETONATOR.
THERE'S A BLUE CABLE RUNNING UPWARD.

THAT WAY, WE COULD DO THIS WITHOUT, LIKE, PEOPLE GETTIN' HURT.
BUT SHOULDN'T WE TAKE MECHAZAWA SOMEPLACE WHERE THERE'S NO ONE AROUND?

BUT WHAT ABOUT MECHAZAWA-KUN?
THAT WOULD BE THE QUICKEST AND SAFEST OPTION...
.....

IF YOU WISH TO FLEE, THEN FLEE.
CHAK
CHAK
IF WE CAN'T SAVE HIM, THEN ALL OF THIS IS MEANINGLESS!
CHAK
30 MINUTES LATER
YEAH! WE'RE SEEIN' THIS THROUGH TO THE END!
NO WAY! WE'RE STAYIN'!
TNK
WE'RE GONNA RUN OUT OF TIME!
YOU'RE STILL NOT DONE?
NOW TO CUT THE GREEN WIRE AND SEPARATE THE BASE...
I HAVE DISARMED THE BOMB.
WHAT'S GOIN' ON, MAN?! TELL US!
PHEW

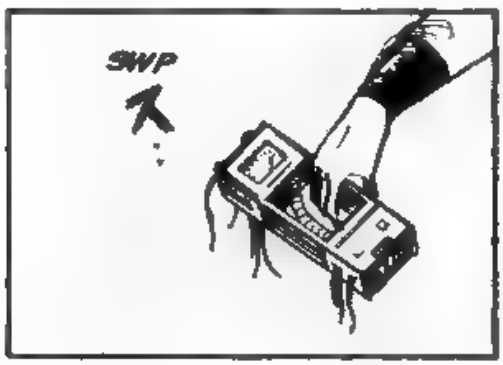


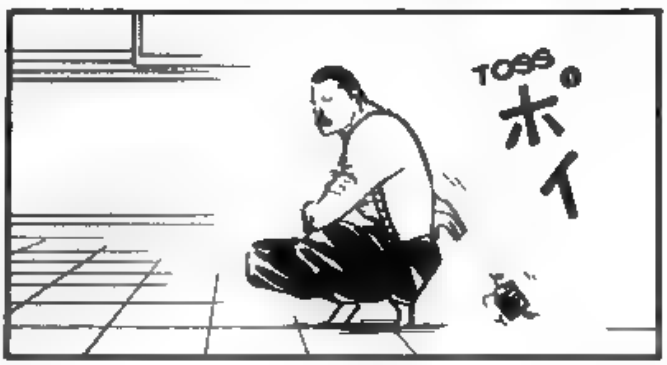
MIGHT AS WELL HAVE JUST LET HIM BLOW UP.

CHAPTER 138: **RADIO MAGIC**

F-
FREDDIE?!
SWSH

YOURE
GONNA
GIVE IT
A SHOT?


SWP

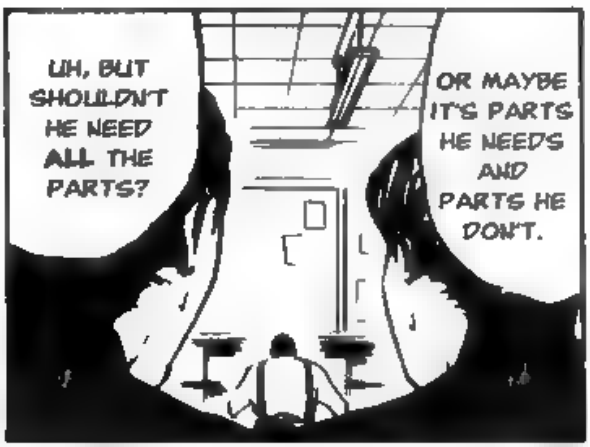

TOSS

DUDE,
NO
WAY...

WHAT
THE HECK
IS HE
DOING?

HE'S DIVIDIN' IT INTO BURNABLES AND NON-BURNABLES!
BURNABLE TRASH
NON-BURNABLE TRASH

SINCE NONE OF US ARE CAPABLE OF REASSEMBLING MECHAZAWA, OUR ONLY CHOICE IS TO WATCH HOW THINGS DEVELOP.


UH, BUT SHOULDN'T HE NEED ALL THE PARTS?
OR MAYBE IT'S PARTS HE NEEDS AND PARTS HE DON'T.

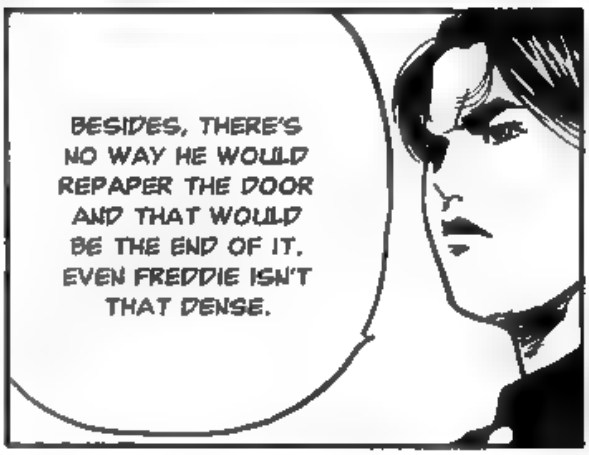
SKLSH
SKLSH

SHP

HUH. IT LOOKS KINDA LIKE HE'S REPAPERIN' A SLIDING DOOR... BUT THERE'S NO WAY, RIGHT?

IS HE GONNA GLUE MECHA-ZAWA BACK TOGETHER?
NOW HE'S MIXIN' UP SOME ADHESIVE PASTE!

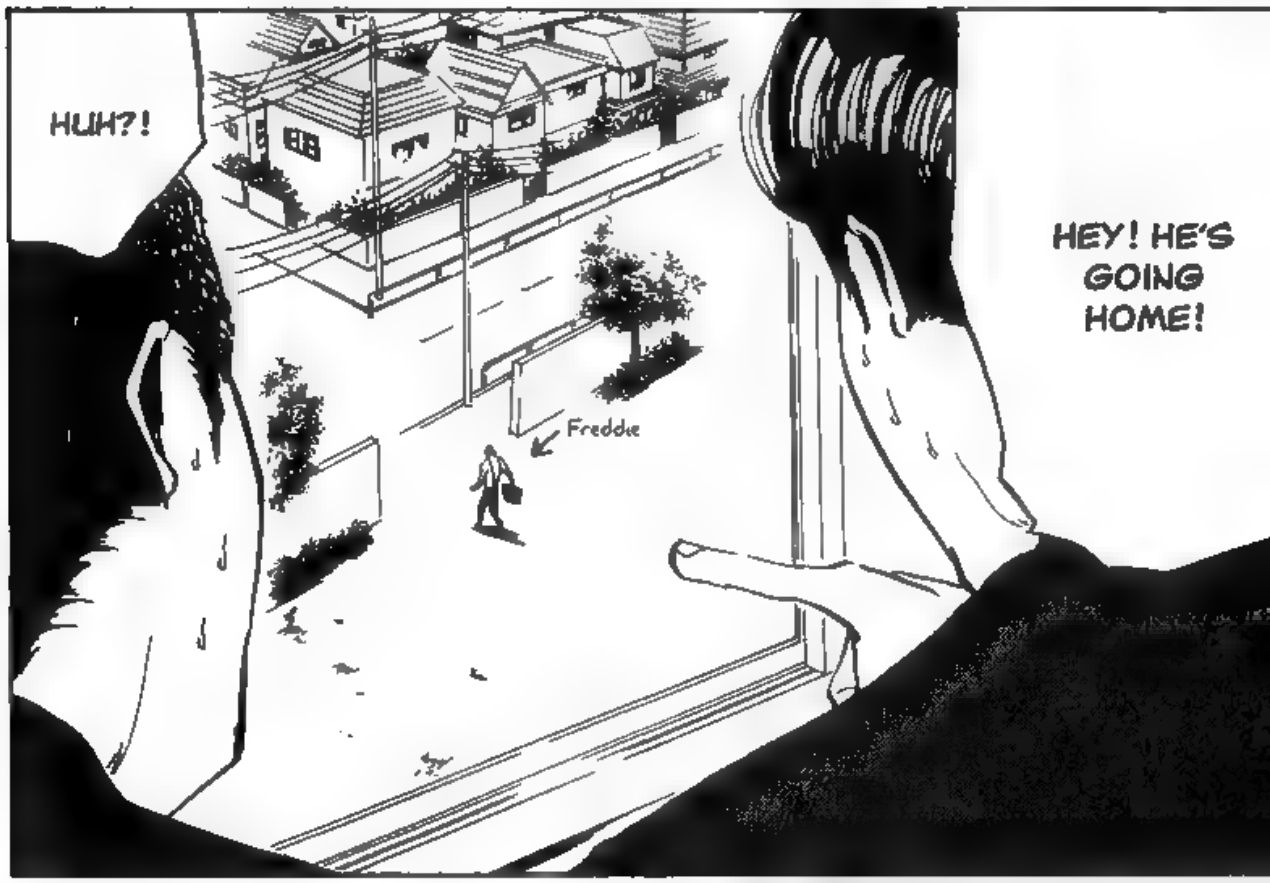
. . . . . .
. . . . . .


BESIDES, THERE'S NO WAY HE WOULD REPAPER THE DOOR AND THAT WOULD BE THE END OF IT. EVEN FREDDIE ISN'T THAT DENSE.

RELAX. WE'RE KEEPING AN EYE ON HIM.
HEY! YOU STILL THINK WE SHOULD JUST SIT BACK AND WATCH?!

THPT
THPT
I'M IN FRICKIN' AWE, MAN!
DAMN. THE DUDE IS A PRO!
SHUT YER TRAP ALREADY! THERE'S NUTHIN' WE CAN DO ABOUT THAT NOW!
STILL, I HEAR YOU SHOULD DO THIS WHEN IT'S RAINY, 'CUZ THE NEXT DAY WHEN THE SUN COMES OUT, THE PAPER STRETCHES OUT ALL NICE.
P-CHT
RATTLE

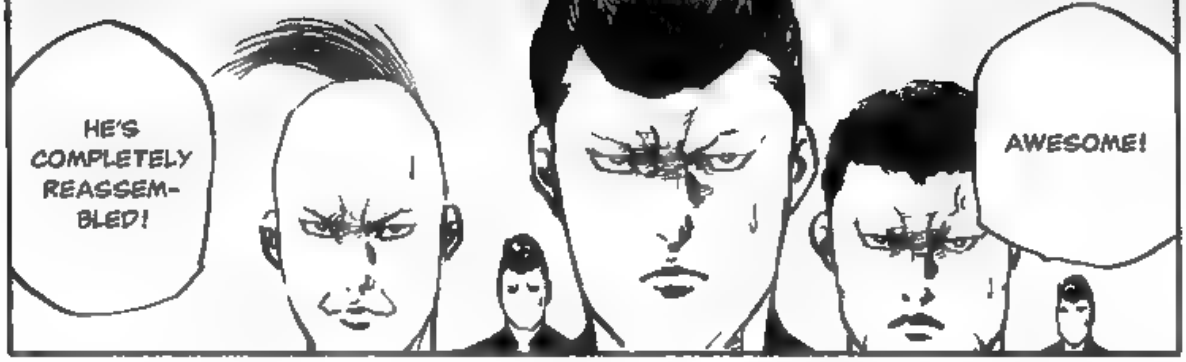
HM?
.....

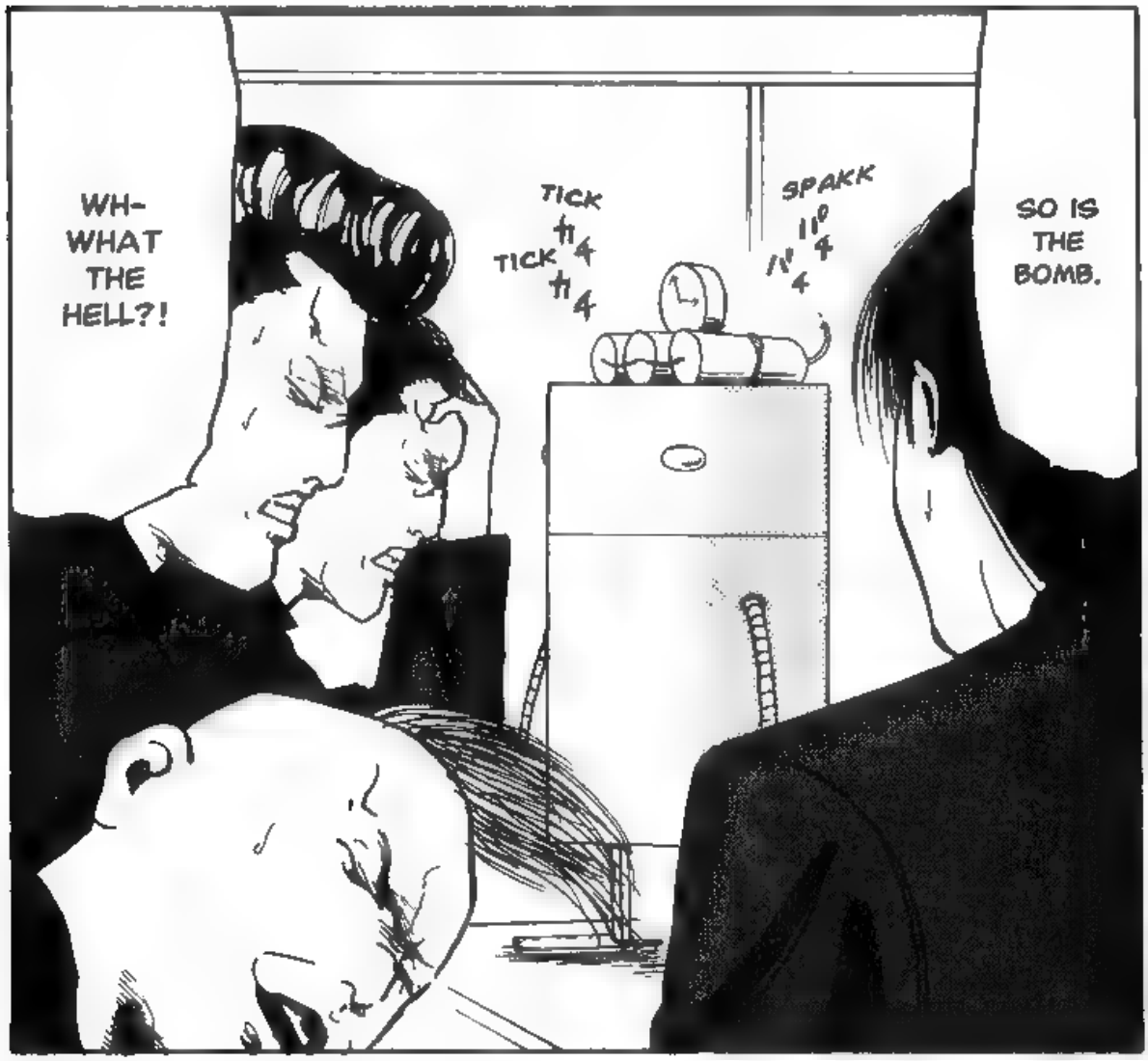

HUH?!
Freddie
HEY! HE'S GOING HOME!

PERHAPS IT WAS HIS WAY OF SENDING US A MESSAGE.
WHAT THE HECK WAS THE POINT OF ALL THAT? WHY DID HE SUDDENLY DECIDE TO REPAPER A SLIDING DOOR?!

AH. EVEN I DIDN'T SEE THAT ONE COMING.
SO HE REPAPERED THE DOOR AND THAT WAS THE END OF IT.

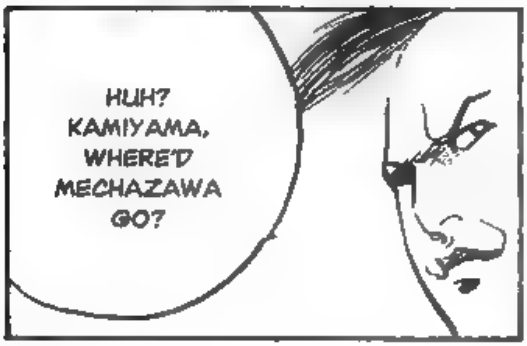
WE'RE OUT OF OPTIONS. AS THE ONE WHO TOOK HIM APART, IT FALLS TO ME TO PUT HIM BACK TOGETHER.
DUDE, WE'RE GETTIN' NOWHERE!
WHAT DO WE DO NOW, KAMIYAMA?!
WITH THAT IN MIND, I SEE NO REASON WHY I SHOULDN'T BE ABLE TO REASSEMBLE MECHAZAWA-KUN!
EVEN FREDDIE COULD REPAPER A SLIDING DOOR...
YEAH, BUT CAN YOU?
LET'S SEE, THIS ONE GOES HERE...
FIRST, I WILL ATTACH THESE COMPO-NENTS.
SIMPLY OBSERV-ING WILL BE HELP ENOUGH.
CAN WE HELP YA?
YES!
ONE HOUR LATER
DUDE, I THINK HE'S GONNA PULL IT OFF!
ALRIGHT. I'M STARTING TO GET IT.





SPEAK, MECHAZAWA!

CHAPTER 139: **WHO'S BAD?**

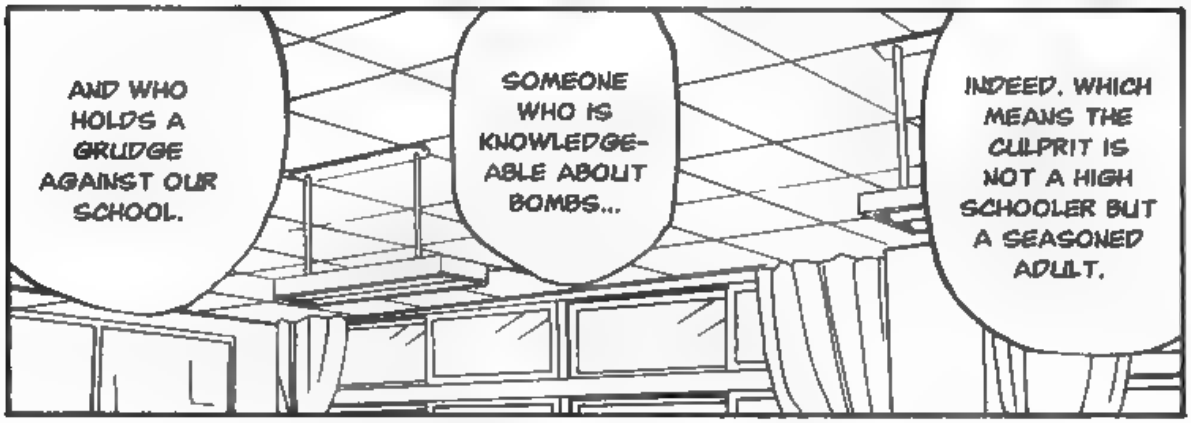


I CAN'T GO THROUGH ALL THAT AGAIN. IF HE ENDS UP GETTING BLOWN TO BITS, WE'LL JUST TAKE IT FROM THERE.
WEREN'T YOU THE ONE TALKIN' ABOUT HOW WE NEED TO SAVE HIS LIFE?!

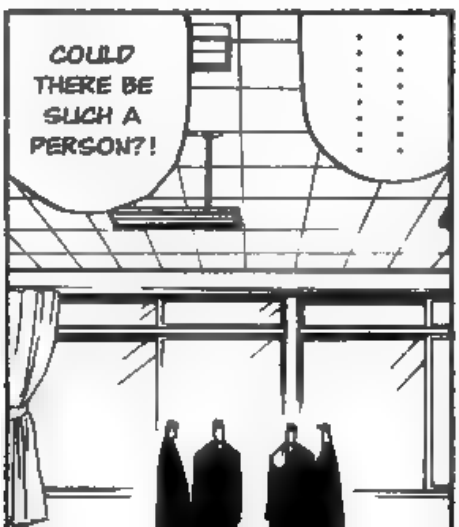
ONE WRONG MOVE AND WE'LL HAVE A NATIONAL CRIME ON OUR HANDS!
THINK ABOUT IT: A BOMB ISN'T THE KIND OF THING A JAPANESE HIGH-SCHOOL STUDENT COULD GET HIS HANDS ON. WITHOUT A DOUBT, THIS IS THE WORK OF A PROFESSIONAL.

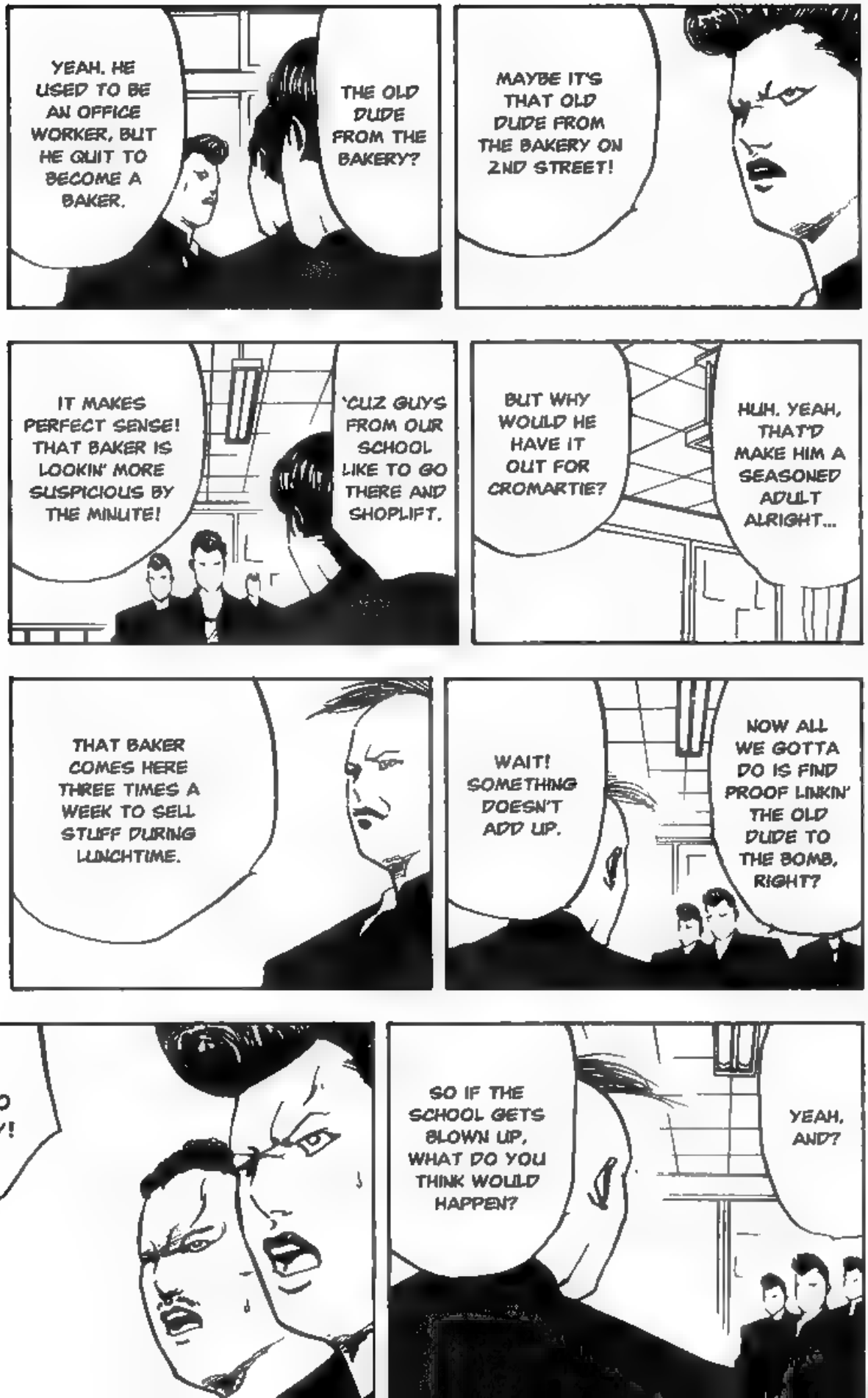
SO WHOEVER'S GOT IT OUT FOR OUR SCHOOL IS A PROFESSIONAL, HUH?

UH, WHEN YOU PUT IT THAT WAY, YEAH.
I BELIEVE OUR PRIMARY OBJECTIVE SHOULD BE LOCATING THE CULPRIT.

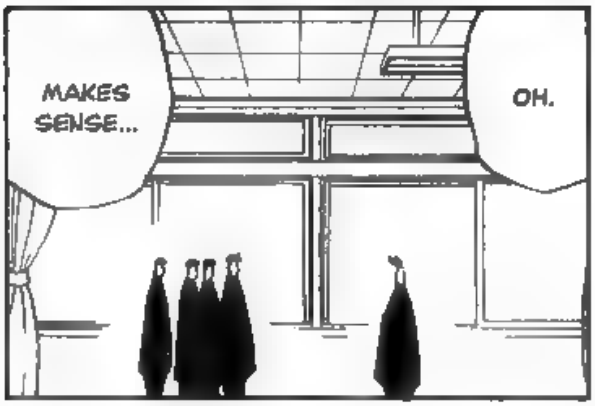

AND WHO HOLDS A GRUDGE AGAINST OUR SCHOOL.
SOMEONE WHO IS KNOWLEDGE-ABLE ABOUT BOMBS...
INDEED. WHICH MEANS THE CULPRIT IS NOT A HIGH SCHOOLER BUT A SEASONED ADULT.

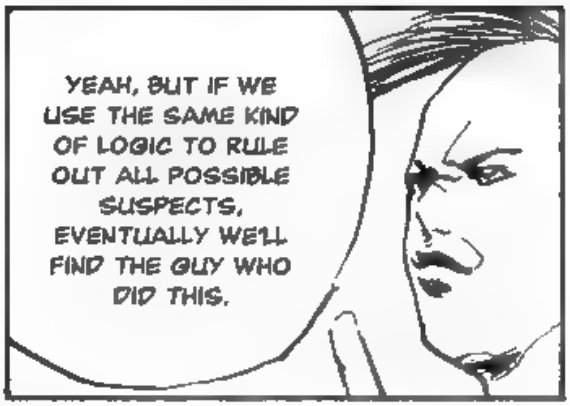
WHOA! YOU GOT SOME IDEA WHO IT IS?
WAIT A SECOND.


COULD THERE BE SUCH A PERSON?!
. . . . . .

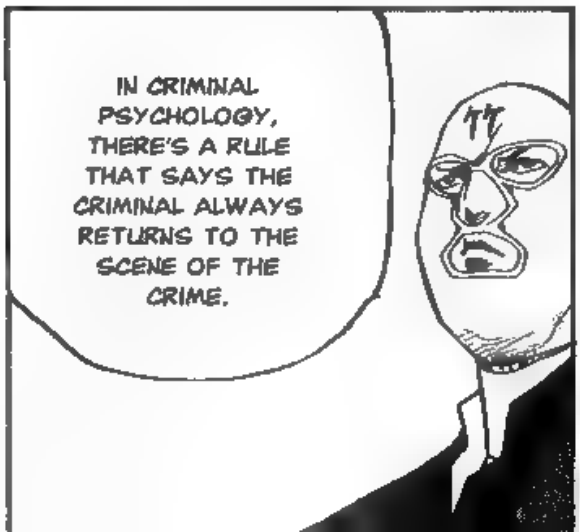

YEAH. HE USED TO BE AN OFFICE WORKER, BUT HE QUIT TO BECOME A BAKER.
THE OLD DUDE FROM THE BAKERY?
MAYBE IT'S THAT OLD DUDE FROM THE BAKERY ON 2ND STREET!
IT MAKES PERFECT SENSE! THAT BAKER IS LOOKIN' MORE SUSPICIOUS BY THE MINUTE!
'CUZ GUYS FROM OUR SCHOOL LIKE TO GO THERE AND SHOPLIFT.
BUT WHY WOULD HE HAVE IT OUT FOR CROMARTIE?
HUH. YEAH, THAT'D MAKE HIM A SEASONED ADULT ALRIGHT...
THAT BAKER COMES HERE THREE TIMES A WEEK TO SELL STUFF DURING LUNCHTIME.
WAIT! SOMETHING DOESN'T ADD UP.
NOW ALL WE GOTTA DO IS FIND PROOF LINKIN' THE OLD DUDE TO THE BOMB, RIGHT?
N-NO WAY!
SO IF THE SCHOOL GETS BLOWN UP, WHAT DO YOU THINK WOULD HAPPEN?
YEAH, AND?

SO THE BAKER'S CLEAN, HUH?
EXACTLY.
HE'D SEE A DROP IN HIS PROFIT MARGIN!


MAKES SENSE...
OH.

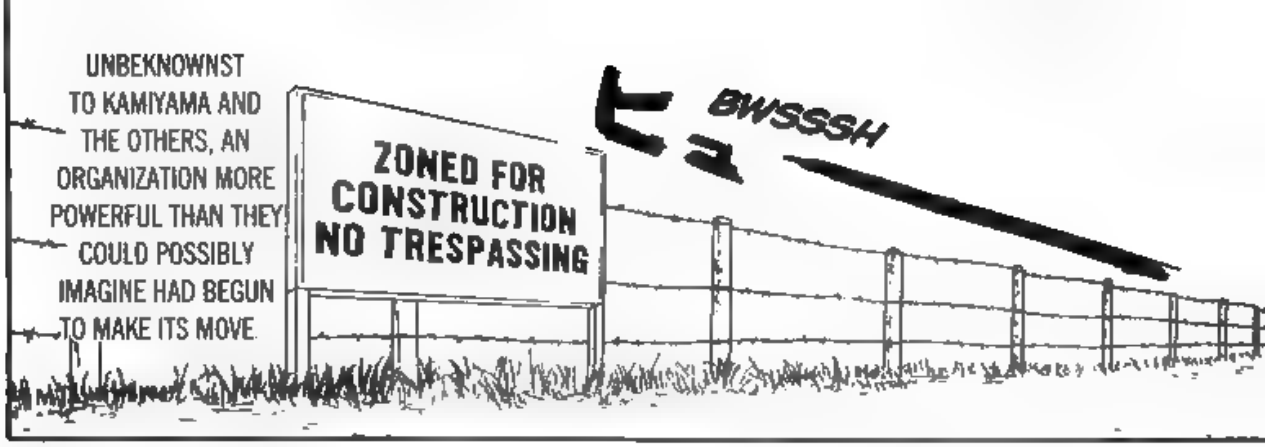

YEAH, BUT IF WE USE THE SAME KIND OF LOGIC TO RULE OUT ALL POSSIBLE SUSPECTS, EVENTUALLY WE'LL FIND THE GUY WHO DID THIS.

ACTUALLY, IT'D PRETTY MUCH ABANDONED HOPE ONCE WE'D STARTED CONSIDERING THE BAKER A CULPRIT.
KAMI-YAMA, DON'T YOU HAVE ANY BETTER IDEAS?
DUDE, IT'D TAKE LIKE THREE **YEARS** TO FIND HIM THAT WAY!

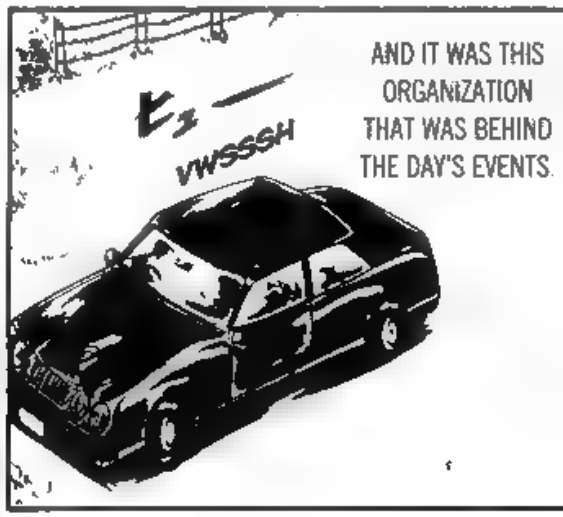

IN CRIMINAL PSYCHOLOGY, THERE'S A RULE THAT SAYS THE CRIMINAL ALWAYS RETURNS TO THE SCENE OF THE CRIME.

WHAT UP, MASK?
MIND IF I ADD SOME-THING?

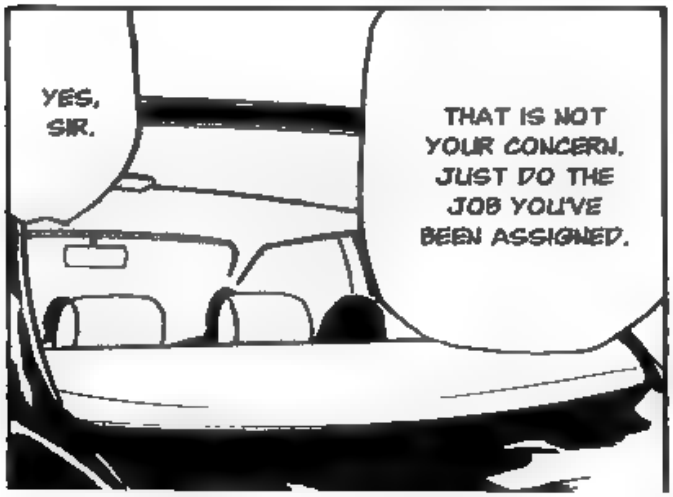
RIGHT.
SO THEN...
YES. CRIMINALS LIKE TO SEE WITH THEIR OWN EYES THAT THEY'VE SUCCESSFULLY PULLED OFF THEIR CRIME.
Trust me, I know.
YOU MEAN LIKE HOW ARSONISTS WILL GO BACK TO WHERE THEY SET A FIRE?
HUH.
IF WE WAIT HERE, THE CULPRIT WILL RETURN.
GOTCHA.
THERE IS NOTHING FOR US TO DO! FROM HERE ON, IT'S A WAITING GAME.
SO, UH, WHAT SHOULD WE DO NOW?
NO! WE JUST NEED TO WAIT!
BUT WE SHOULD BE DOING SOME-THING, RIGHT?


UNBEKNOWNST TO KAMIYAMA AND THE OTHERS, AN ORGANIZATION MORE POWERFUL THAN THEY COULD POSSIBLY IMAGINE HAD BEGUN TO MAKE ITS MOVE.
ZONED FOR CONSTRUCTION NO TRESPASSING
BWSSSH

VWEEE

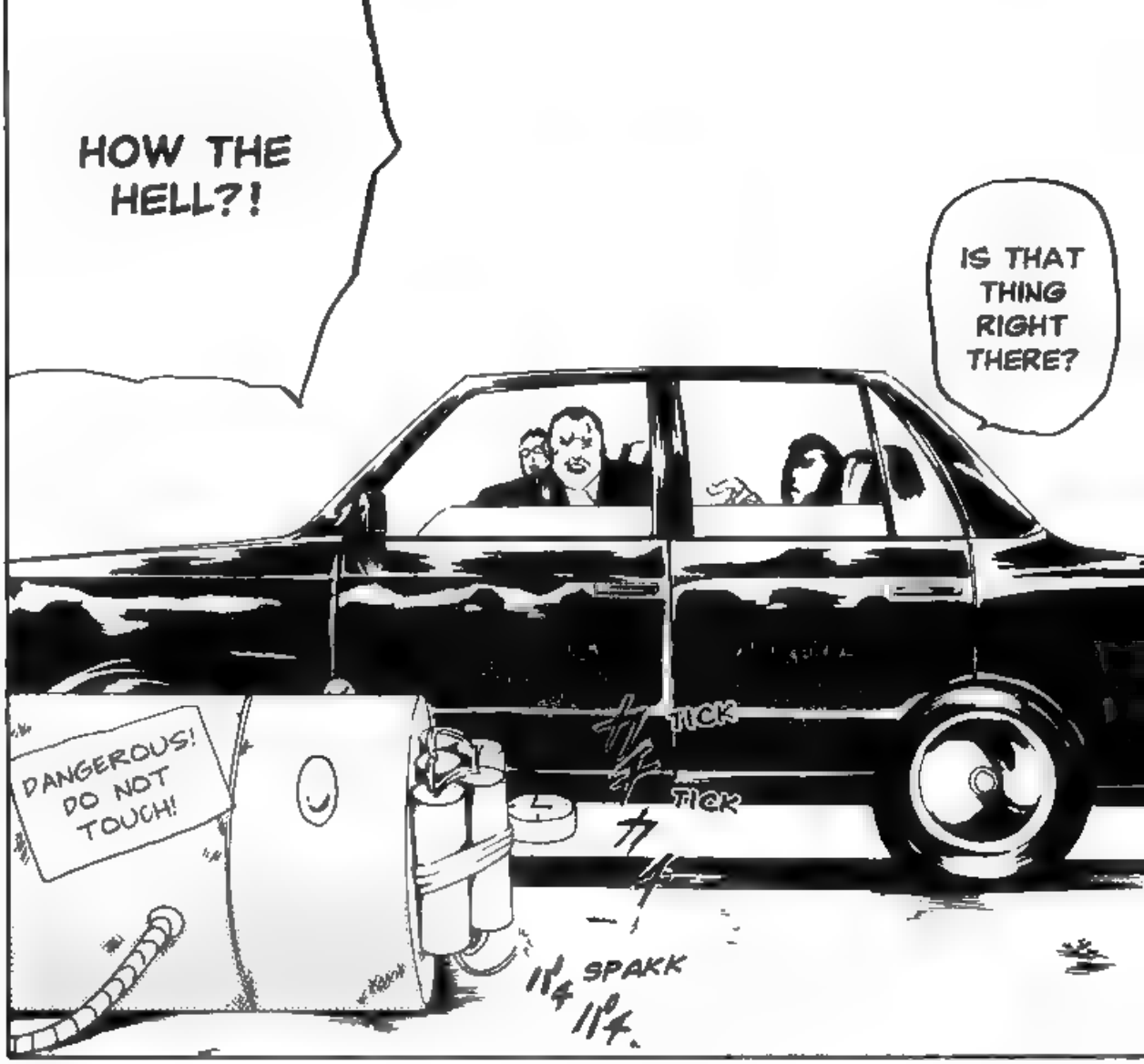

VWSSSH
AND IT WAS THIS ORGANIZATION THAT WAS BEHIND THE DAY'S EVENTS.

CROMARTIE'S PROBABLY BLOWN TO SMITHEREENS BY NOW.
NO PROBLEMS AT ALL, BOSS.
WELL? DID EVERYTHING GO AS PLANNED?


YES, SIR.
THAT IS NOT YOUR CONCERN. JUST DO THE JOB YOU'VE BEEN ASSIGNED.

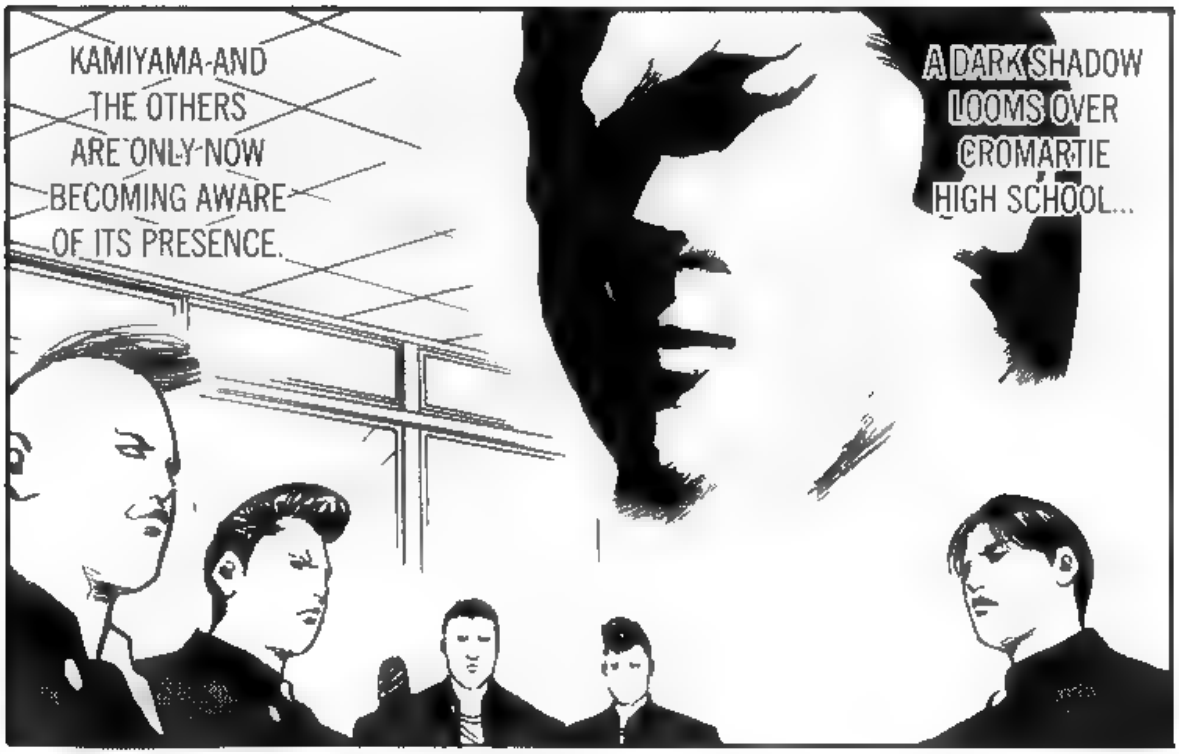
BY THE WAY, WE STILL HAVEN'T BEEN TOLD WHY WE'RE SUPPOSED TO TAKE DOWN CROMARTIE...

WELL, FOR SOME REASON THERE WAS AN **OIL DRUM** STASHED IN OF ONE OF THE CLASSROOMS, AND WE FIGURED IT'D MAKE THE PERFECT PLACE TO SET THE BOMB.
NOW THEN, WHERE EXACTLY DID YOU PLANT THE BOMB?
HOW DID YOU KNOW THAT, SIR? YES, IT DID HAVE TWO EYES ON IT.
TELL ME, DID THIS "DRUM" HAVE TWO EYES ON IT?
AN OIL DRUM...
HUH? N-NOW THAT YOU MENTION IT, I SEEM TO RECALL IT DID HAVE TWO ARMS AND LEGS.
AND DID IT HAPPEN TO HAVE TWO ARMS AND LEGS AS WELL?
I DON'T NECESSARILY **KNOW** ANYTHING. HOWEVER, IS IT POSSIBLE THAT THIS "DRUM" YOU'RE REFERRING TO...
HOW DO YOU KNOW ALL THIS, BOSS? DO YOU HAVE SOME CONNECTION TO WHAT GOES ON AT CROMARTIE?

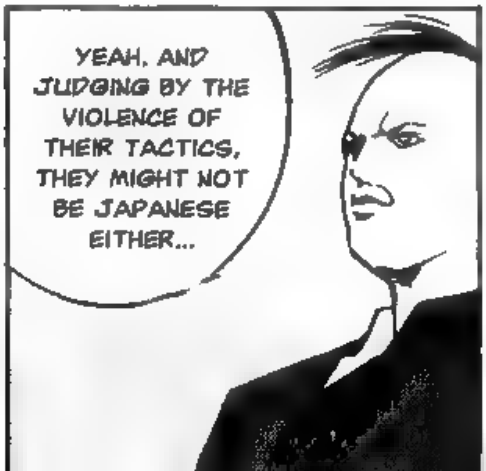


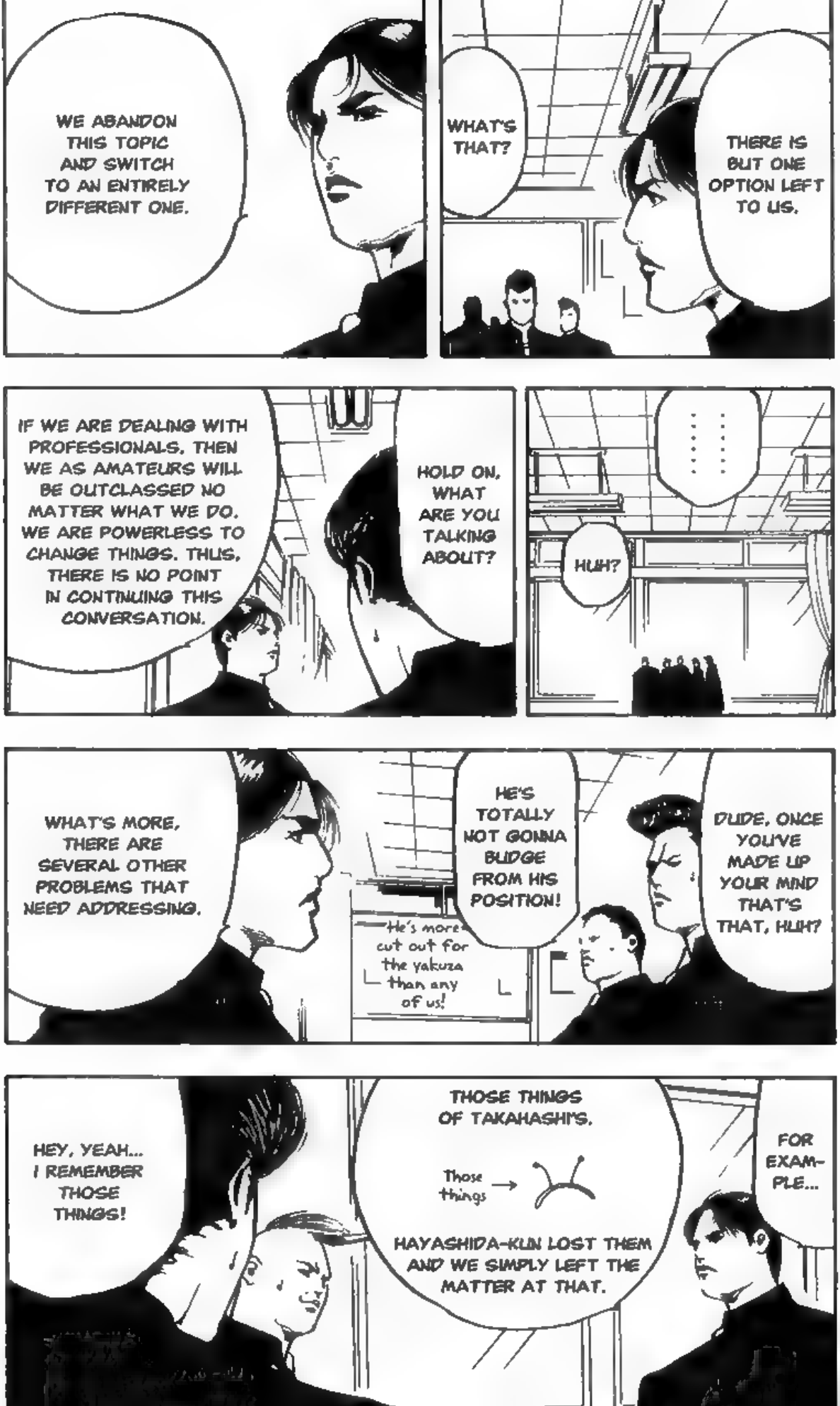
NEXT CHAPTER: "BEHOLD! THE BAKER OF JUSTICE!" (JUST KIDDING)

CHAPTER 140: **GET BACK**

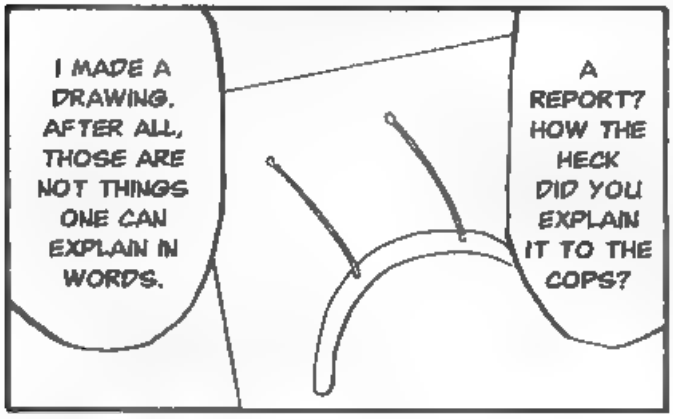


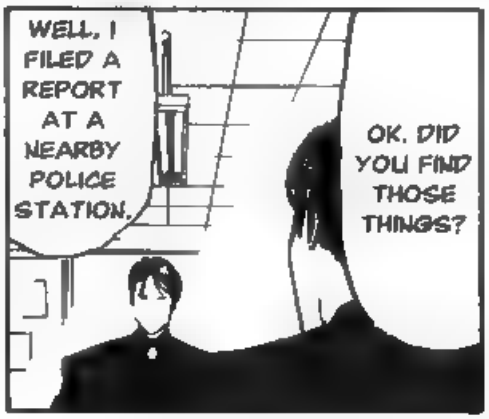
AND NOT JUST ONE OR TWO EITHER--I'LL BET THERE'S A WHOLE ORGANIZATION OR SOMETHIN' THAT'S OUT TO GET US!
THIS AIN'T NO AMATEUR WE'RE DEALIN' WITH. THIS IS THE WORK OF A PRO!



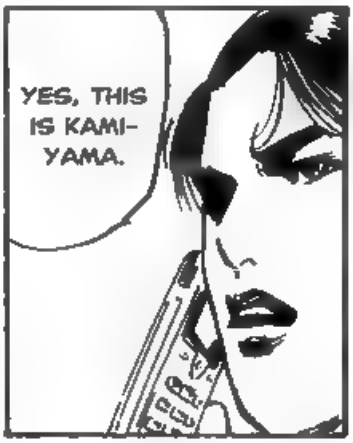

WE ABANDON THIS TOPIC AND SWITCH TO AN ENTIRELY DIFFERENT ONE.
WHAT'S THAT?
THERE IS BUT ONE OPTION LEFT TO US.
IF WE ARE DEALING WITH PROFESSIONALS, THEN WE AS AMATEURS WILL BE OUTCLASSED NO MATTER WHAT WE DO. WE ARE POWERLESS TO CHANGE THINGS. THUS, THERE IS NO POINT IN CONTINUING THIS CONVERSATION.
HOLD ON, WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?
.....
HUH?
WHAT'S MORE, THERE ARE SEVERAL OTHER PROBLEMS THAT NEED ADDRESSING.
He's more cut out for the yakuza than any of us!
HE'S TOTALLY NOT GONNA BUDGE FROM HIS POSITION!
DUDE, ONCE YOU'VE MADE UP YOUR MIND THAT'S THAT, HUH?
HEY, YEAH... I REMEMBER THOSE THINGS!
THOSE THINGS OF TAKAHASHI'S.
Those things →
HAYASHIDA-KUN LOST THEM AND WE SIMPLY LEFT THE MATTER AT THAT.
FOR EXAM-PLE...

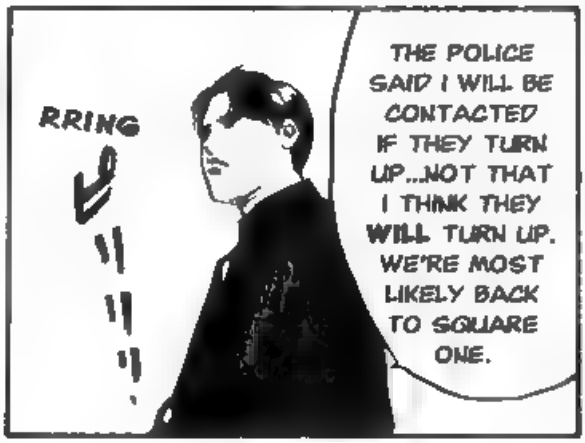
SO YOU'RE SAYIN' WE SHOULD SET BIG PROBLEMS LIKE THIS BOMB THING ASIDE AND START TAKIN' CARE OF OUR SMALLER PROBLEMS, RIGHT?
Yeah, he's right.
WE'VE LEFT MATTERS UNRESOLVED ON COUNTLESS OTHER OCCASIONS...IT WOULD BE A PAIN TO LIST THEM ALL, SO I WON'T, BUT REST ASSURED THAT NUMEROUS MATTERS ARE CRYING OUT FOR RESOLUTION!


I MADE A DRAWING. AFTER ALL, THOSE ARE NOT THINGS ONE CAN EXPLAIN IN WORDS.
A REPORT? HOW THE HECK DID YOU EXPLAIN IT TO THE COPS?


WELL, I FILED A REPORT AT A NEARBY POLICE STATION.
OK. DID YOU FIND THOSE THINGS?

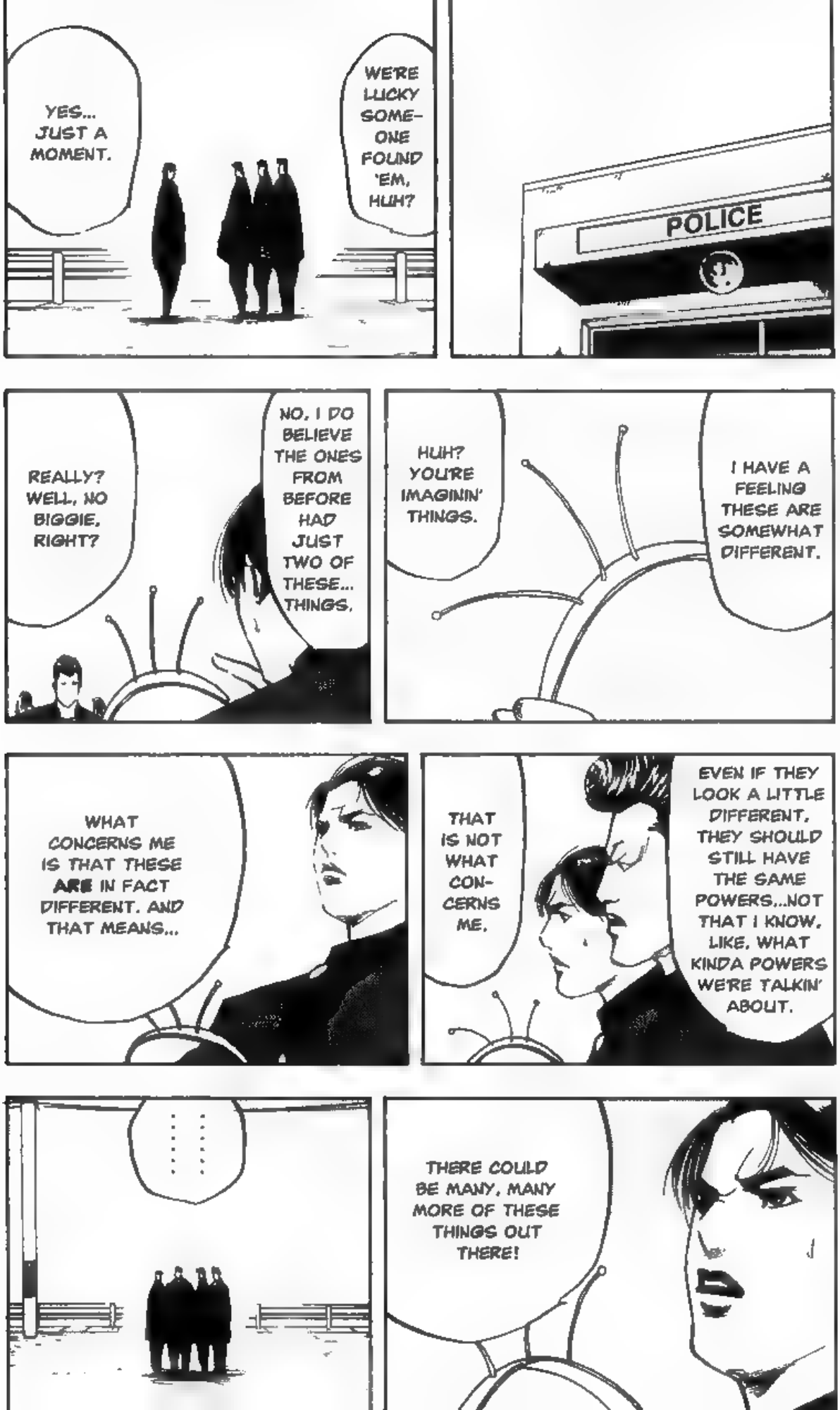
.....


YES, THIS IS KAMI-YAMA.

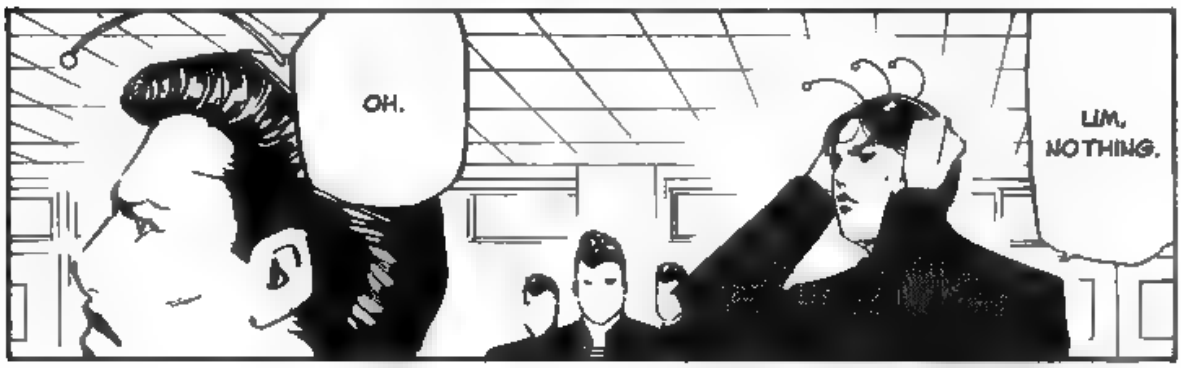

RRING
THE POLICE SAID I WILL BE CONTACTED IF THEY TURN UP...NOT THAT I THINK THEY WILL TURN UP. WE'RE MOST LIKELY BACK TO SQUARE ONE.

HUH?!
THEY TURNED UP.

WHAT'S GOIN' ON?
BEEP

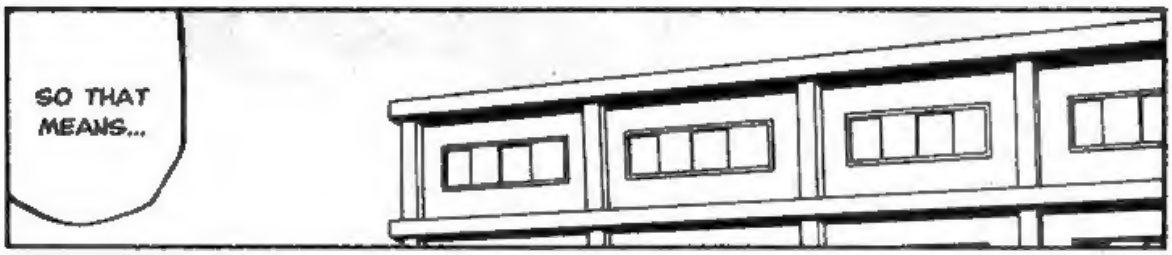

YES... JUST A MOMENT.
WE'RE LUCKY SOME-ONE FOUND 'EM, HUH?
POLICE
REALLY? WELL, NO BIGGIE, RIGHT?
NO, I DO BELIEVE THE ONES FROM BEFORE HAD JUST TWO OF THESE... THINGS.
HUH? YOU'RE IMAGININ' THINGS.
I HAVE A FEELING THESE ARE SOMEWHAT DIFFERENT.
WHAT CONCERNS ME IS THAT THESE ARE IN FACT DIFFERENT. AND THAT MEANS...
THAT IS NOT WHAT CON-CERNS ME.
EVEN IF THEY LOOK A LITTLE DIFFERENT, THEY SHOULD STILL HAVE THE SAME POWERS...NOT THAT I KNOW, LIKE, WHAT KINDA POWERS WE'RE TALKIN' ABOUT.
.....
THERE COULD BE MANY, MANY MORE OF THESE THINGS OUT THERE!

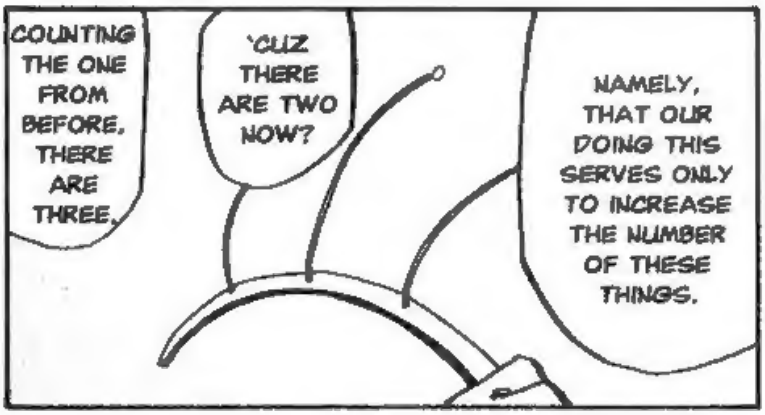
YEAH. WE CAN'T KEEP DRAGGIN' THIS THING OUT FOREVER!
IN ANY CASE, LET'S RETURN THESE TO TAKAHASHI-SAN AND BE DONE WITH IT.
IN A WAY, IT'S SCARIER THAN THAT BOMB!
THAT'S JUST SCARY...
TAKAHASHI!
CLASS 2-1
MAN, I OWE YOU ONE!
DON'T WORRY, I'LL HANDLE THIS. YOU JUST LAY LOW FOR A WHILE.
SOME PUNK I BEAT UP A WHILE BACK IS ROUNDIN' UP REINFORCE-MENTS FROM DESTRADE. THINGS COULD GET UGLY, AND IT'S ALL MY FAULT!
WHAT?
TAKAHASHI-SAN! UM...
NOW'S OUR CHANCE TO RETURN THOSE THINGS! C'MON, KAMIYAMA!
TAKA-HASHI-SAN IS AS AWESOME AS EVER!



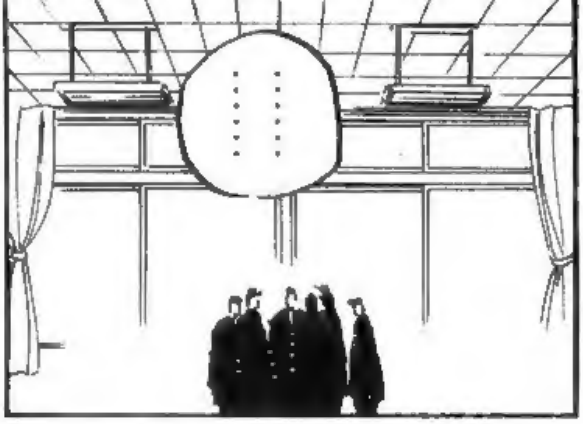
NOW TAKING SUGGESTIONS FOR WHAT TO CALL THOSE THINGS.

CHAPTER 141: **WHAT YOU'RE DOING**




COUNTING THE ONE FROM BEFORE, THERE ARE THREE.
'CUZ THERE ARE TWO NOW?
NAMELY, THAT OUR DOING THIS SERVES ONLY TO INCREASE THE NUMBER OF THESE THINGS.

WHAT IF YOU TRY PUTTIN' THEM ON YOUR HEAD AND CONCEN-TRATING REAL HARD?
WE TRIED SEVERAL DIFFERENT EXPERIMENTS, YET ALL WERE FRUITLESS.



NOT NOTICING WHAT'S IMPORTANT IS ANOTHER PART OF YOUTH.

VOLUME 6 ★ THE END

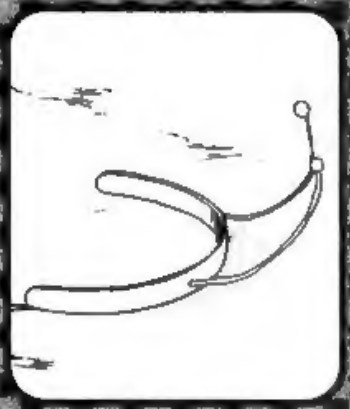
AN INTRODUCTION TO A NEW CHARACTER

Yet another man of mystery. If you're wondering just how much of a mystery he is, he's so mysterious that neither your humble author nor his editor know who he is...though, of course, it would be more accurate to say it's not so much a matter of mystery as it is a matter of us not having given him much thought. I haven't even come up with what his face looks like. It's an old rule of thumb in manga circles that when characters have their faces hidden in shadow it just means their design hasn't been finalized yet, so I wouldn't give such instances too much thought. I have no idea why such a fine adult would start showing up around the school (LOL), but since I've already made it out to be such a big deal, I'm sure it will end up being a very important reason. Who is this guy anyway?! If you have any good ideas, please let me know. Seriously.

MR. X

AND A ONE-TIME-ONLY INTRODUCTION TO AN ITEM

TAKAHASHI'S THINGS



A few people may wonder what these things are, while the vast majority couldn't care less. Even Hayashida found them to be a little odd. As usual, I wasn't thinking when I introduced them into the story, and my editor and I were hard pressed to think of a good way to handle them. When it came time for the serial run of this story, we tried putting in a request for readers to send in postcards to answer just what these things are. I'll take this opportunity to make it clear that no good ideas were forthcoming. (LOL) These things later came to be called "the two-antennae type," as it would seem there are in fact other kinds. I get the feeling I've seen these being sold before at street fairs...In any case, it's been established that they don't fire any kind of beam. Would these be considered gaudy? Subdued? Kinda lame? Truly, they are most difficult to pin down...

CROMARTIE HIGH SCHOOL VOLUME SIX

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